Marie Huxtable December 2013 - DRAFT

Evolving action research by professional practitioners concerned with higher education.

Abstract

Academic librarians, as professionals concerned with higher education, expect to not only draw on knowledge but to also contribute to it. This paper shows how employing a Living-Theory approach to action research an educational professional can, in the process of researching their practice to improve it, evolve their understanding of action research and create educational knowledge that contributes to enhancing practice and the realisation of their institution's values-based vision.

Introduction

Research, as with ideas, does not develop neatly through a single lineage to serve a single purpose in welcome open contexts.   Action research is no exception. It has been evolved by people with various motivations in complex inter and intra personal contexts to serve a variety of purposes.

To usefully understand ideas requires a reader develops some insight into the motivations and contexts of the writer as well as their own. By 'usefully understand' I want to indicate that I am writing with the belief you are reading this paper with a desire to create knowledge and not simply acquire information. To 'usefully understand' I believe you need to creatively and critically engage with what you read with the intention of: developing insights into your own practice and research; improving what you are doing and; contributing to your own learning, the learning of others and the social formations you live and work in.

This paper is organised as follows:

1. I begin by inviting you with me on the leg of my journey when I was introduced to action research by doing it.

2. I then briefly describe what I have understood to constitute some key features of educational action research that are particularly relevant to professional practitioners, such as academic librarians, who are concerned with higher education.

3. I conclude by reflecting on a Living-Theory approach to action research as a form of action research I believe might be particularly useful to you as a professional concerned with higher education.

1. Introduction to action research by doing

I worked in English local authorities from 1976 until 2012 as an educational psychologist. At the time of writing this paper I am an honorary research fellow with the University of Cumbria researching my practice to improve it. My practice continues to be concerned with supporting and developing educational relationships, provision and opportunities for learners of all ages to develop and offer as gifts; talents, expertise and knowledge: knowledge of the world, them selves and them selves in and of the world.

When I first came across action research I was wrestling with a long-standing question. I can now articulate this as, 'how can I contribute to the education of children and young people learning to live loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives for themselves and others through my practice as an educational psychologist?' During the mid 1990's I became increasingly interested in what contributed to the development and expression of 'high abilities' by a person throughout their lifetime. What started as a project I undertook while working as a school psychologist, developed into a full-time occupation as senior educational psychologist developing and implementing the local authority inclusive gifted and talented educational policy. The project was called APEX[1]. Some details of the project can be found in, *APEX Living Legacies: Stories creating futures* (Henon).

APEX comprised a variety of learning opportunities for children, young people and adults, and professional development events, workshops and courses for educational professionals. These two threads are distinct, yet inter-related. As I developed the work I realised that I could present a work plan detailing what I was doing and

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[1] APEX – *ALL* are Able Pupils Extending Opportunities – was an inclusive gifted and talented education project improving opportunities for all children to develop talents, skills, expertise and knowledge as gifts.

how. However, I also realised I could not articulate the rationale that underpinned and informed the development of APEX, or offer standards by which I could evaluate what I was doing and hold myself to account.

As a psychologist I was familiar with various forms of social science research but none enabled me to address the questions that plagued me as an educational practitioner, for instance:

- how did I contribute to children and young people developing aspirations and the confidence and competences to realise them to their own benefit and that of society;

- how could I evaluate what I was doing;

- how could I rationally choose between one theory or path of action and another;

- how could I enhance the opportunities for learners to create and contribute valuable and valued knowledge of the world, of themselves and themselves in and of the world.

Educational psychologists have struggled to develop, and have accepted, appropriate forms of enquiry and theorising beyond those that are quasi-scientific and rooted in the natural sciences. I see other educational practitioners in higher education and other contexts tackling similar problems. Approaches to evolving action research have emerged from such struggles.

Teachers doing action research became increasingly fashionable in UK education. By 2004 it was identified in my local authority's development plan. I began to work with the inclusion officer, my long time colleague Chris Jones, 'To build the capacity of schools regarding inclusive practice through action research'. I began by reading a few articles about action research. However this didn't offer me anything new. Action research appeared similar to many of the problem-solving and problem-based enquiry approaches I had been working with and developing myself (Levey, Tempest and Knapman) for years. I then had the good fortune to be introduced to Jack Whitehead. I discovered he knew something about action research (at that time I didn't realise how much) and was willing to join the group Chris Jones and I were establishing to develop the ability of local authority staff to support teachers' action research.

It was the start of what proved to be a transformational leg of my learning journey. Along the way I evolved my understandings of action research, its possibilities and limitations. I learned by researching my practice to improve it, dipping in and out of the literature and having numerous challenging conversations with colleagues, students, parents and many other people. I offer you here some of the story of that journey in the hope something might be of interest to you on your own journey.

Nigel Harrisson, the Inclusion and Learning Manager in my Authority, was key in taking the group beyond an introduction to action research to become a supportive "culture of enquiry" (Delong). These weekly early morning meetings became known as the conversation café. Undertaking action research is not a swift or easy business, so having supportive associations was important to sustaining motivation and providing creative, critical challenge. Like me you may need to look beyond your department to find others who would be delighted to learn and research with you. There are international e-based groups you can also participate in. For instance, there is the practitioner-research JISC list, which you can join from http://www.actionresearch.net. JISC stands for Joint Information Systems Committee and it is a UK government funded initiative that includes the free provision of e-forums for academics in higher education.

Jack Whitehead's way of supporting and facilitating members of the group to develop their understanding of action research was to them take straight into developing their research. It is a strategy I can recommend to anyone who wants to evolve their understanding of action research.

The form of action reflection cycle he took us through is one he has developed since the 1970's and integrated into a Living-Theory approach to action research:

1. What do I want to improve? What is my concern? Why am I concerned?

2. Imagining possibilities and choosing one of them to act on in an action plan

3. As I am acting what data will I collect to enable me to judge my educational influence in my professional context as I answer my question?

4. Evaluating the influence of the actions in terms of values and understandings.

5. Modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of evaluations

Three key, underlying assumptions are that:

- You are asking a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in your professional practice.

- Your embodied educational knowledge could make a valuable contribution to professional and academic knowledge bases if you researched your question.

- Your educational knowledge will deepen, extend and transform as you research your practice and generate your living-educational-theory. Your living-educational-theory is your values-based explanation for your educational influences in your own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which you are living and working. (Whitehead, "Using a Living Theory Methodology")

If you wish to explore further you will find numerous resources on http://www.actionresearch.net.

In holding myself accountable to my employer (Bath and North East Somerset), a public service, I did so with regard to the values expressed in their vision statements, such as these that were on their website, 29th August 2011:

> 'We want all Children and Young people to enjoy childhood and to be well prepared for adult life.
>
> We want all Children and Young People to do better in life than they ever thought they could. We will give children and young people the help that they need to do this. - Our vision, Children's Services.'

This, in spirit, is similar to the vision statements of many higher education establishments that you as an academic librarian work for. For example, The Ohio State University Vision:

> 'To advance the well-being of the people of Ohio and the global community through the creation and dissemination of knowledge.' (Accessed 19th December 2014 from
> http://www.osu.edu/academicplan/vision.php)

You may feel, like I do, that it is important to hold myself accountable to contribute to my employer realising its vision *and* to do what I believe to be right according to the values that give my life meaning and purpose.

Although the detail of my employer's vision changed with time, the underlying values expressed did not. With this in mind the key question, the one that underpinned all my activities leading APEX, was of the form:

> How can I help children and young people learning to live loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives through my professional practice as a senior educational psychologist?

As we progressed we were each engaged in our own unique enquiry in a community that enabled us to learn from and with each other. Jack Whitehead facilitated by bringing his own enquiries to the group for critique and validation. He brought literature that he thought might be interesting, thought provoking or helpful to individual members, as well as the latest works that were stimulating his thinking, and he valued what he was offered by group members. By being a co-learner and fellow researcher, as well as facilitator and tutor, he encouraged us all to do the same, creating a space that became increasingly educational, inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian.

As I became more familiar with a Living-Theory approach to action research, through doing it, I realised the relevance to other parts of my work leading the development of inclusive gifted and talented educational theory, practice and provision.

The literature on 'gifted and talented education' highlighted that those who develop early beyond the expectations of their age behave as 'experts' and thrive where they are supported and encouraged to do so. An expert enquires into a question of personal interest, in a disciplined manner, within a time frame and with a valued outcome. I had understood what enquiring in a disciplined manner looked like from the work on TASC (Thinking Actively in A Social Context) (Wallace and Adams) that I had been introducing to teachers for some years. TASC offered a form of disciplined enquiry that was comprehensible to children and adults, content free and could be followed irrespective of the field of enquiry.

Figure 1. The steps of enquiry in the TASC (Thinking Actively in A Social Context) approach (Wallace et al., 2004)

You can see that TASC can also be recognised as a form of action research. I show it to you here because it was not until I began to work with a Living-Theory approach to action research that I began to recognise and evolve my tacit and embodied knowledge. I used TASC to frame my Masters module research (Huxtable, "Walking the talk") and eventually integrated it with Living-Theory (Huxtable, "Living Theory and TASC", "Evolving Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries) as a research method. Here I will illustrate a Living-Theory approach to action research by showing you the development of the Masters programme for teachers I established and supported, which arose from what I had learned about action research and Whitehead's living-theory pedagogy at the conversation café. I am using the 'action planner', which you can find on

http://actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arplanner.htm

1. What do I want to improve? What is my concern? Why am I concerned?

There were few opportunities for children and young people to create knowledge as an expert and similarly few opportunities for adults to extend their own abilities as knowledge creators through disciplined enquiry.

I was concerned because my experience is that 'trained' teachers 'train' children. I believe that teachers need to engage in their own educational learning if they are to be able to provide such educational opportunities and support for their students. I also wanted to contribute to the development of educational opportunities and relationships that enabled learners of all ages to recognise and value themselves as knowledge creators and develop the confidence and competence to take responsibility for their educational growth.

2. Imagining possibilities and choosing one of them to act on in an action plan

I asked Jack Whitehead in 2005 to offer modules for a professional Masters programme at the University of Bath where he was a Lecturer in Education. My intention was to provide opportunities for educators to learn to

research their own educational practice and experience the form of educational learning I believe teachers should be encouraging their students to engage in. I felt I should walk my own talk and so initially registered and completed a Masters module (Huxtable, "How can I improve my practice through 'walking the talk' and 'dealing with doorsteps'?") before registering in 2006 on a doctoral programme.

3. As I am acting what data will I collect to enable me to judge my educational influence in my professional context as I answer my question?

Over the weeks and months the teachers gradually built their living-theory accounts of their enquiries into their practice to improve it and successfully submitted them for validation as Masters modules.

4. Evaluating the influence of the actions in terms of values and understandings.

Evidence of the teachers' educational learning and their influence in the learning of their students is provided by their Masters accounts. For instance, Sally Cartwright's, "How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their own learning?" Sally was a secondary school teacher. And Joy Mounter's, "Can children carry out action research about learning, creating their own learning theory?" Joy was a primary school teacher who later completed her dissertation as a Head teacher, "As a Headteacher Researcher how can I demonstrate the impact and self-understandings drawn from Living Theory Action Research, as a form of Continual Professional Development in education?" Other examples of the influence of educational practitioners in their own learning and that of their students and colleagues in terms of their values and developing understandings can be accessed from http://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml.

5. Modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of evaluations

As I continued to support teachers and other educators working on the Masters programme I deepened my own understanding and practice, an account of which I offered as my doctoral thesis in 2012 and now draw on in this article. The abstract gives you some insight into some of my values, beliefs and motivations that I bring to critically and creatively engaging with action research:

My educational practice is concerned with enhancing children and young persons' abilities to learn to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, for themselves and others. This thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge as a multimedia narrative. It communicates my ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, and social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society. I clarify meanings of my values, as they emerge within living-boundaries through the evolution of my living-theory praxis, to form explanatory principles and living standards of judgment in my claim to know my practice.

Working as a senior educational psychologist responsible for implementing policy on high ability learning, I experienced the following concerns: Practice, theory and research often appeared to lose connection with the purpose of education; Theory and practice appeared to be developed independently, and without explanation or evaluation related to values of education; Those involved with education appeared to be in discrete worlds, each vying to exert their hegemony over the totalising development of educational theory, practice and provision.

Emerging from my research I offer four original ideas:

1) **Living-Educational-Theory praxis**, highlighting the fundamental importance of educators creating 'values-based explanation of their educational influences in learning' (Whitehead, 1989a), as they research to develop praxis within living-boundaries.

2) **Living-boundaries** as co-creative space within which energy-flowing values can be clarified and communicated.

3) *Inclusive* **gifted and talented education developed from an** *educational* **perspective**, which enables each learner to develop and offer talents, expertise and knowledge as life-affirming and life-enhancing gifts. The knowledge is that created of the world, of self, and self in and of the world.

4) **Living-Theory TASC**, a relationally-dynamic and multidimensional approach to research and developing praxis, which integrates Living-Theory (Whitehead, 1989) with Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace and Adams, 1993).

I continue to work at improving my educational praxis and testing the validity of my research through offering accounts to research groups I am involved with, to conferences and to journals, such as this one. One of the strengths of a Living Theory approach to action research is the use of four questions derived from Habermas' four criteria for social validation (Habermas) as human beings seek to reach an understanding with each other. Habermas points to the importance of comprehensibility, truth, rightness and authenticity. Living-theory action researchers often submit their accounts for strengthening to validation groups of between 3-8 peers in which participants are asked to focus on four questions to help to strengthen the validity of the explanations offered by the action researcher:

i) How can I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?

ii) How can I strengthen the evidence I offer to justify the assertions I make?

iii) How can I deepen and extend the understandings of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in the writings and the practice?

iv) How can I enhance the authenticity of the explanation in showing over time and interaction that I am truly committed to the values I claim to hold.

2. Some key features of educational action research

Here I re-engage with the literature on different forms of action research to explore again how others have resolved, or not, the tensions created between:

- action and research,
- fulfilling my responsibilities as a professional concerned with higher education contributing to the success of the organisation and my responsibilities to myself and others to live my values as fully as I can in the process

Action research arose, evolved and diversified, in fits and starts from the early 20th century in response to concerns of academics and practitioners to improve action in diverse fields and countries. Action research has various histories reflecting both the socio, historical and academic culture of the country within which it is located and the country from which influential researchers hail. Action research in China offers one example (see -http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/moira.shtml) and action research in Germany (Altrichter and Gstettner) another.

To add a further complication 'action research' is sometimes used synonymously with terms such as 'participatory research', 'collaborative inquiry', 'emancipatory research', 'action learning' and 'practitioner research', although each can also have its own particular emphasis, advocates and canon of literature.

Some action research is located in a discrete world of practice, such as that of a community activist; social scientist; teacher; production engineer, health worker, academic librarian etc. Other action research can be thought of as situated in living-boundaries (Huxtable, "Evolve Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries") between worlds of practice and academia. These are created by people who have the intention of researching what they are doing to understand, explain and improve it and, as McTaggart said, generate "… new insights and understandings that meet defensible standards for knowledge claims" (7).

Action research has almost as many 'definitions' as definers with the definitions and emphases reflecting the researcher's complex socio cultural and historical inter and intra personal ecologies, purposes and knowledge bases. However most action research:

- appears to be a form of practitioner research;

- have a clear intention to improve something that is important to participants;

- involves systematic enquiry, which includes cycles of action and reflection.

The purposes of a piece of action research can be diverse, as indicated above by Ocholla, Ocholla and Onyancha. At times these can appear paradoxical. For simplicity here I broadly categorise the purposes of the action researcher as those to improve action and create knowledge:

- that serves the employers needs, with improvement being judged by 'given' standards, such as 'outcome indicators' and 'targets';

- that contributes to a world in which humanity can flourish, with improvement being judged by values-based living standards of judgement (J. Whitehead, "Living Educational Theories for Action Research in a Turbulent World"; Laidlaw).

Features that distinguish action research by professional practitioners concerned with higher education are:

- A clear intention to improve practice, provision or organisation and create knowledge that contributes to the flourishing of humanity, through systematic enquiry, which includes cycles of action and reflection;

- Researchers clarify the values that give their life and work meaning and purpose as they emerge through the research. As they are clarified they form, at least some of, the explanatory principles and standards of judgement of the action taken;

- The inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian nature of the educational i~we relationship (Whitehead and Huxtable) is clarified and evolves in the course of the research.

There are numerous articles that propose the origins of action research. Most, but not all, attribute the origin to Lewin. I like this article, "Kurt Lewin and the origins of action research" by Adelman because it provides me with some insight into Lewin the person with values, beliefs, motivations, academic roots and social connections. I can see that Lewin wanted to develop theory, practice and provision that was inclusive and democratic, through doing what he was employed for, in the factory and community:

> In the late 1930s Kurt Lewin and his students conducted quasi-experimental tests in factory and neighbourhood settings to demonstrate, respectively, the greater gains in productivity and in law and order through democratic participation rather than autocratic coercion. (Adelman, 7)

Adelman sums up action research as, "… the means of systematic enquiry for all participants in the quest for greater effectiveness through democratic participation." (7). While Lewin may have managed to live his values, the efficacy of his research was not judged by how well he had enhanced democratic participation within factory and community, but on the basis of productivity of the factory and law and order in the neighbourhood

where he was employed to research. The question that I think Lewin wanted to answer was something like, 'How can we learn how to work together democratically to be as productive as possible?' which is focused by values. Rather than 'How can I increase the productivity of the factory's workers?' which is focussed by economic and technocratic demands. The language of the question results in an unintentional shift of importance from values as explanatory principles and standards of judgement to those that are simply economic or technocratic. It is a subtle and continual challenge that action researchers in higher education need to be aware of and resist.

Higher education is concerned with values. Professionals concerned with higher education, in whatever role, would therefore expect to bring the values that give their lives purpose and meaning into their research. This is made explicit in some forms of action research and not others. Biesta's (27) reflection that we have a well-developed language of learning but not of education is very apposite here.

In a higher education setting a practitioner might want to enquire into how they enhance the educational experience of students as they work to the highest standard of accreditation on their course. Contrast this with enquiring into 'how do I increase student grades?' With both enquiries grades provide one form of success criteria. However the practitioner concerned to enhance the educational experience of the students would also be looking for, and most importantly want, evidence that they were having an educational influence in learning so that they might improve what they were doing.

An academic institution is not simply with the transmission of knowledge but also with the creation of knowledge and fostering the courage to do so. As A.N. Whitehead said in 1927:

> "The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience… Today business comes to Harvard; and the gift which the University has to offer is the old one of imagination, the lighted torch which passes from hand to hand. It is a dangerous gift, which has started many a conflagration. If we are timid as to that danger, the proper course is to shut down our universities… For American education no smaller ideal can suffice." (91-101)

Universities being places of higher education are concerned with people creating educational knowledge that contributes to the flourishing of humanity as well as contributing to the knowledge base of a field, discipline or profession. Like Oancea and Pring I believe that "… the aims of education are essentially moral—concerning the qualities and virtues, the capabilities and understandings that, under the banner of 'education', are thought worth promoting "(29).

Most practitioner and academic researchers would recognise, and probably accept, Ocholla, Ocholla and Onyancha's definition of research in their paper on research publication by academic librarians as "… a way of finding answers to unknown or lesser known problems emerging from natural and artificial phenomena within our environment through a systematic, logical, and verifiable process." (6) They detail some of the various and complex reasons that people, individually and collectively, undertake research:

> "What motivates individuals and organisations to conduct research is not uniform across the board. The ideal and perhaps main reasons (Ocholla, 2011) are to find solutions to challenges or problems affecting humanity that stem from natural and artificial phenomena; confirm, contest or refute theories or hypotheses; develop scientific and professional practices; and to develop creative, analytical and rational thinking for informed decision making. On a more practical basis, research is done to fulfil learning, domestic and career needs; to satisfy curiosity; for egoistic reasons, such as recognition and visibility; for career-related rewards, such as promotion, securing tenure or permanent appointment; and for self-development or growth, among other reasons." (6-7)

I quote at length from this paper because it highlights the complexity of the intra and inter personal terrain not only of 'research' but also of 'action' undertaken by academic librarians.

Research does not evolve itself. It may seem obvious but it is often forgotten that motivated persons evolve research and ideas. People do this, individually and collectively, shaping, and shaped by, complex, dynamic intra and inter personal contexts. Ideas seem to take on a life of their own but they only exist in the minds of human beings and evolve as living people work with them and share with other people the knowledge they create in the process.

For Lewin action research "… was exemplified by the discussion of problems followed by group decisions on how to proceed. Action research must include the active participation by those who have to carry out the work in the exploration of problems that they identify and anticipate." (Adelman 9)

Lewin's approach does not recognise the researcher's tacit and embodied knowledge and values as contributing to the action. The reasons for this may be inferred from what Adelman writes about Lewin's personal and academic history and contribution to founding experimental social psychology.

The study of self (as agent and actor) in psychology has been largely restricted to psychotherapeutic movements. Usually the psychologist does not include themselves in their research or give an account of the values-based contribution that they want to make through what they do. A self-study form of action research has developed particularly by researchers and teacher educators in higher education. The beginning of the Self-Study Special Interest Group (S-STEP) of the American Educational Research Association in 1993 and the publication of the summer issue in 1995 of Teacher Education Quarterly 'Self-Study and Living Educational Theory', mark nodal moments of the development of self-study in the USA.

Self-study research has developed internationally since the 1970s. Self-study presents a challenge to the researcher to understand their educational influence in learning, or lack of it, and recognise and develop responses to improve situations. It also presents a challenge to the orthodoxies of academia. Some universities still try to demand that the researcher remove the 'I' from their study. The majority of journals also insist on a 'blind review' process that requires the author to remove any material whereby they can be identified. None-the-less self-study is increasingly becoming an accepted form of academic and practitioner research, to the extent that S-STEP is one of the largest special interest groups of AERA (the American Education Research Association).

The field of self-study action research is diversifying as it grows and it is evident that the self that is studied is not necessarily the same in all forms of self-study. Some are more concerned with the professional self, others with a rarified self. A Living-Theory approach to action research (Whitehead and McNiff) is possibly of most relevance to academic librarians, researching their practice in the context of higher education, as it is concerned

with the researcher researching their complex self. This complex self is professional and living, ontological, relationally-dynamic and in an i~we relationship. It expresses values that give the researchers life purpose and meaning and which form explanatory principles and living standards of judgment of practice.

As a professional concerned with higher education I believe your practice/actions and research are concerned with enhancing the efficient transmission of knowledge, skills and information *and* with the creation and contribution of further valued and valuable knowledge of individuals and collectives.

When I talk of individuals and I am not thinking of a person divorced from community. I am thinking of a unique human being, being human, recognised and valued in a creative, productive relationship with other people, and social formation concerned with the flourishing of humanity. I represent this as i~we (Whitehead and Huxtable). 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. I use ~ to indicate a living-boundary that is a respectful and co-creative space. It is a similar sense I make of Ubuntu that Nelson Mandela expresses in this brief (1.37mins) 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.

Video 1 Nelson Mandela on Ubuntu http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODQ4WiDsEBQ

A.N. Whitehead identifies the importance of bringing the living ontological and relational 'i' into higher educational studies and research when he said, "We have to remember that the valuable intellectual development is self-development…" (2). Where I disagree with him is where he finishes the sentence by

saying, '…it mostly takes place between the ages of sixteen and thirty'. From personal experience it is life long and I have seen the ossifying consequences when people become stuck in the time warp of their youth.

McTaggart identifies Moreno as the originator of action research and defines action research arising from participatory and community action researchers "Put simply, action research is the way groups of people can organise the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience, and make this experience accessible to others." (316-317)

He describes the relationship between researchers and practitioners as:

> "Academics and workers in participatory action research are joined by a thematic concern - joint concern about a practical problem and a commitment to inform and improve a particular practice. This practice is not a narrowly conceived technical activity but "any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative activity" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 175) with the intention "that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the goods and ends involved, are systematically extended" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 181). In this sense, practices like education, fanning, social work and automobile manufacture are distinguished from the institutions like schools, programmes and factories which are created to enable and protect them." (318)

Later he says '… a fundamental purpose of action research is to make practices and the values they embody explicit and problematic." (319) While concerned with researching values lived in practice some forms of action research contribute to a social science epistemology and the disciplines of education not to an educational epistemology. This is clearly the purpose of many, such as McTaggart, as he expresses in his paper, 'Participatory Action Research: issues in theory and practice'. He makes a distinction between social and educational, for instance in his abstract, "Action research is now common in educational and social practices of various kinds… Action research remains a diverse and thoroughly justified and preferred mode of educational and social enquiry, continuing to address the concerns of both its practitioners and its critics." (313)

However he does not say what distinguishes between the two and places action research firmly within the discipline of social science "Action research is not a 'method' or a 'procedure' but a series of commitments to observe and problematise through practice the principles for conducting social enquiry…".

Later Schön said there was a need to develop a new epistemology for the new scholarship of teaching, which he believed would come from action research and Eisner pointed to the need for different forms of representation.

I see educational practice and research as not the concern just of teachers but of all those who are intending to enhance their educational influence in learning. I understand educational practice, research and epistemology to be characterised by the expression of values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity.

Reiss and White bring the aims of education being both for the benefit of the individual and community together when they say the task of education is to, ' equip each child [and adult]:

- to lead a life that is personally flourishing and

- to help others to do so too.' (p.1)

Or as expressed graphically in this letter from a Head teacher quoted by Ginnot. He points to the importance of remembering that education at all ages and stages is concerned with living values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity:

> "Dear Teachers:
>
> I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness. Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.
>
> So I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, or educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human." (137)

Higher education is a process. It is also a context or place in the physical world and through the World Wide Web. A place where knowledge is transferred, instruction and training given and the novice gains the skills and

knowledge relevant to induction into a world of practice or academic discipline, but also a place where knowledge is created and shared to the benefit of individuals, collectives and ultimately to the benefit of us all. The 'educational' nature and purpose of higher education with respect to enhancing an individual's ability to develop talents, expertise and knowledge as life-enhancing gifts life must not be lost, overlooked or ignored.

I find creating new knowledge, let alone offering it as a contribution to the Academy and worlds of practice, is a messy business and it is not easy, especially in contexts where it is perceived as a challenge to established forms of research and knowledge, and reputations built on them. Should you travel this path less taken you might find it reassuring to bear in mind you are not alone. Sometimes you may find supportive, constructively critical, researching colleagues and communities close by, and sometimes you may have to look beyond your own department or institution.

Educational theory and knowledge is concerned with relationships that flow with energy. As such they requires forms beyond simply text in their generation and communication.

I understand that action research as a form of systematic enquiry, which includes action reflection cycles as a heuristic tool. Action research by those concerned with higher education is a form of self-study focussed on improving and explaining the contribution the living 'i' of the researcher makes to learning and professional practice and the flourishing of humanity. The educational knowledge created makes a contribution to a new form of epistemology using multimedia narratives to communicate the energy flowing values that form explanatory principles and living standards of judgement (J. Whitehead, 2009).

3. A Living-Theory approach to action research

I have said that there are many approaches to action research reflecting the researcher's complex socio cultural and historical inter and intra personal ecologies, purposes and knowledge bases. As an academic librarian concerned with higher education wanting to improve action and create knowledge you will be selecting a form of action research that enables you to create knowledge that:

   1) serves your employers needs, with improvement being judged by 'given' standards, and also,

2) contributes to an educational epistemology.

A Living-Educational-Theory approach to action research is particularly suitable because of the three original ideas that distinguish it from other forms of action research:

- The first idea is that the researchers own living, ontological, relationally-dynamic and professional 'i' is included in research questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

- The second idea is related to the way in which we improve what we are doing. We combine our ability to act and reflect systematically to solve problems in our daily work with researching to improve something because we believe that our values could be lived more fully in our practice.

- The third idea concerns our accounts of our learning and educational development as we research. These accounts communicate valid descriptions and explanations of educational influence in learning as contributions to our own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations we live and work in.

As an academic librarian I understand you are a professional practitioner concerned with higher education and that you have particular roles and responsibilities that contribute to the realisation of your institution's values-based purposes, such as exemplified in the USA by The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina's core values of honor, duty and respect and Ohio State University's Core Values:

- Pursue knowledge for its own sake.

- Ignite in our students a lifelong love of learning.

- Produce discoveries that make the world a better place.

- Celebrate and learn from our diversity.

- Open the world to our students.

As your professional practice is located in higher education I also expect that you provide support to members of an academic community to access and contribute to learning, information, and knowledge creation, management, transfer, exchange and exploitation.

As an academic librarian you have a knowledge base that you expect to draw on and "Due to the significance attached to research and publication across all sectors of their institutions, academic librarians in public universities should also be expected to conduct research and publish their research results in scholarly outlets." (Ocholla, Ocholla and Onyancha 6)

Snow called for the development of procedures for transforming and communicating knowledge created through self-study in her presidential address to the American Educational Research Association. The 21st century technology has not just increased the possibilities for providing access to information and knowledge, but also to the evolution of new forms of knowledge, through the development of e-based documentation and multimedia narratives, that transcend the limitations of print. These new forms of documentation and communication I imagine are of particular interest to you both in your role as academic librarian and as a professional researching your educational influence in higher education and contributing to the development of a new epistemology and form of scholarship.

Descriptions, explanations and standards of judgement of educational practice are concerned with understanding and communicating relationally dynamic life-affirming and life-enhancing values at the core of higher education institutions and organisations.

In conclusion, I see a Living-Theory approach to action research to be a form of knowledge-creating self-study research of practice to improve practice, where the researcher generates values-based explanations of their educational influences in learning, their own, other peoples and the social formations they live and work in. As it is contributing to the development of a new epistemology, scholarship, forms of representation and logic it is better suited to the needs of a professional concerned with higher education, researching their practice to improve it, than other forms of action research I have found to date.

There is now a substantial body of knowledge to call upon which demonstrates the acceptability of Living-Theory research and Living-Theory action research in Universities with outstanding international reputations. I hope in generating and offering your living-theory research as an academic librarian you will contribute to the growth and influence of educational knowledge to bring more into being a world where humanity flourishes.

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