

Making Connections with People, Purpose and Place through Living Educational Theory research.

Jack Whitehead, University of Cumbria. Presented at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland virtual conference 25-26 March 2021 with the theme. 'Possibilities in education: Reimagining connections with People, Purpose and Place.'

Abstract

(a) Background/context

In Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 1985, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2008, 2020) individual practitioner-researchers generate and share their explanations (living-educational-theories) of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings with values of human flourishing. The background includes a summary of some 50 years of educational enquiry into the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice as an educator and educational researcher?'

In a keynote to ESAI (Whitehead, 1998) I make the following points about research-based professionalism

For those of you who are not familiar with the ideas of research-based professionalism and of living-educational-theories it may be helpful if I say that, for me, research-based professionalism refers to the process of enhancing teacher professionalism through constructing our professional knowledge-base from our self-studies of our own professional practice. Living-educational-theories are, for me, the descriptions and explanations which individuals offer for their own professional learning as they ask, answer and research questions of the kind, 'how do I improve what I am doing?'. Living-theories are different from the traditional kind of theory in which the explanations are presented in terms of general concepts. Living-theories are part of the way individuals create their own form of life. They are living because of the way they explain a present practice in terms of an evaluation of the past and in terms of an intention to create something better in the future in one's own practice. The fundamental explanatory principles are not presented in abstract, linguistic concepts, they are presented as values, embodied in one's practice and embedded in a particular social contexts. Their meanings emerge through practice and require, for their communication both ostensive and linguistic definition. In other words we both 'show' and 'tell' when we try to communicate the meanings of the values which constitute our relationships as 'educative'.

In today's address I want to bring the two ideas together in a new synthesis on Developing Research-Based Professionalism through Living Educational Theory research in the context of:

1) Creating a Teaching Council in Ireland: Learning from the Work of the

Teacher Training Agency in England and Wales and the Ontario College of Teachers in Canada.

2) Legitimizing teachers' professional knowledge in partnerships between Universities, Professional Development Centres and a Teacher's Council. (p.1)

In 2006 The Teacher Council of Ireland was established under the Teaching Council Act of 2001. As the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland, the Teaching Council acts as the gatekeeper to the teaching profession at primary and post-primary level, and within specific areas of the further education sector. Whilst recognising the importance of the code of professional conduct for teachers in the updated 2ⁿ Edition of 2016 I want to focus on overcoming a limitation in the view of professionalism held by the Teaching Council. The limitation I have in mind is the lack of appreciation by the Teaching Council of the importance of the educational knowledge-creating capacities of teacher in enhancing their own professionalism over a life-time's commitment to improving their educational practices.

I want to be clear that I agree with the Teaching Council that the role of the teacher is to educate and that the values underpinning the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct include respect, care, integrity and trust (Teaching Council 2016, p. 6).

I am arguing for an extension to the Teaching Council's view of Professional Development where the Council states that:

Teachers should:

5.1 take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice by:

- actively maintaining their professional knowledge and understanding to ensure it is current
- reflecting on and critically evaluating their professional practice, in light of their professional knowledge base
- availing of opportunities for career-long professional development. (p.8)

In this paper I shall now explore the implications of adding to the above view of professional development:

- exercising their educational responsibility to contribute to the professional knowledge base of education as educational knowledge creators.

In this exploration below I am seeking to support the Teaching Council's commitment to developing a national framework and guidelines for CPD in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

(b) Research aim

The research aim is focused on the evidence that demonstrates the academic legitimization of the explanations produced by educational practitioners of their educational influences in learning, in their continuing professional development, within their sites of practice. The evidence includes the living-theory doctorates of four founder members of the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) and the ESAI SIG on Values-based Practitioner Action Research (v-PAR), and their subsequent publications below. It includes the evidence of the academic legitimization from Universities around the world with over 40 living-theory doctorates on continuing professional development that are publicly available from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>.

The evidence also includes the arguments from Whitehead and Huxtable (2016) and Whitehead et al (2020) on creating a profession of educators with the living-theories of master and doctor educators and the inclusion of these arguments in two Living Educational Theory research masters degrees (Mounter 2020) for the continuing professional development of educational practitioners.

(c) Methods and data sources

The methods drawn on include those used in the methodologies of Action Research, Narrative Inquiry, Action Research and Autoethnography for use in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'.

Narrative Inquiry/Research

This research method uses artefacts such as autobiography, conversations, interviews, journals, field notes, letters, family stories, photos and life experience, as the units of analysis. Its aim is to research the way people use story to create meaning in their lives. A narrative method used in research generates knowledge in stories that can be communicated to others and whose validity can be publicly tested.

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly in the following publications have been most influential in explicating and communicating this approach to research in education:

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2004) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. London; Wiley.

Clandinin, D. J. (2007) *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. London; Sage.

Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D.J. (Eds.) (1999) *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice*. University of Western Ontario; Althouse Press. See Chapter 11, *Stories to Live By: Teacher Identities on a Changing Professional Knowledge Landscape*.

Action Research

In 1953 Stephen Corey produced the first text book on action research in education on 'Action Research to Improve School Practices.' This method of enquiry, using an action planner, involves the action researcher studying their own practice in order to improve it. Action Planners usually involve: the expression of a focus on what the researcher wants to improve; an action plan, the values that determine what counts as an improvement; gathering data to make an evidence-based judgement on improvement; an evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions; a modification of the concern, plan and action in the light of the evaluation. Producing an explanation of educational influences in learning.

See the Educational Action Research Journal at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/react0>

There are now many books on Action Research including:

McNiff, J. & Whitehead J. (2011) All You Need to Know About Action Research. 2nd Edition. London; Sage.

Autoethnographical Research

A clear response to the question, 'What is Autoethnography?' has been provided by Ellis and Bochner (2000).

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2000) Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as subject, pp. 733-768 in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000) Handbook of Qualitative Research, Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, California; Sage Publications.

Autoethnographies are usually written in the first person voice that connects the personal to the cultural as a distinguishing characteristic of an autoethnography. The self-study of the researcher must include sociocultural and sociohistorical influences to be counted as an autoethnography.

See Jack Whitehead's 2016 Book Review of: Academic Autoethnography: Inside Teaching in Higher Education, Daisy Pillay, Inanathen Naicker and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (eds.). 2016, Rotterdam; Sense Publishers. Educational Journal of Living Theories 9(1), 139-147. Accessible from:

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwreviewautoethnography2016.pdf>

Justifying your creation of a living-theory methodology in the creation of your living-educational-theory.

Responding to Creswell's ideas on: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies; Ellis' and Bochner's ideas on autoethnography; Whitehead & McNiff's ideas on action research and Living Educational Theory research; Tight's ideas on phenomenography.

See:

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arsup/livingtheorymethodologies.pdf>

The methods include processes of validation (Whitehead, et al, 2020) for strengthening the comprehensibility, evidence, sociocultural and sociohistorical understandings and authenticity of the explanations of educational influences in learning (Whitehead, 2002)

Data Sources include the explanations from practitioner-researchers of their educational influences in learning in their doctoral theses (Glenn, 2006; McDonagh, 2007; Roche, 2007, Sullivan 2006)

Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice. Máirín Glenn's PhD thesis, University of Limerick, 2006. Accessed from: <https://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=50>

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realise our learning potentials? Caitriona McDonagh's PhD thesis, University of Limerick, 2007. Accessed from: <https://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=48>

Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy: interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just community of enquiry. Mary Roche's PhD Thesis, University of Limerick University, 2007. Accessed from: <https://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=46>

A living theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality. Bernie Sullivan's PhD thesis, University of Limerick, 2006. <https://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=47>

The data sources include the following publications.

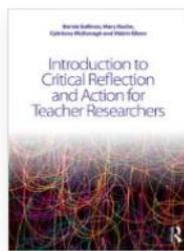


Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research

A Teacher's Guide to Professional Development, 2nd Edition

By **Caitriona McDonagh, Mary Roche, Bernie Sullivan, Máirín Glenn**

Paperback – [2019-08-12](#)
Routledge

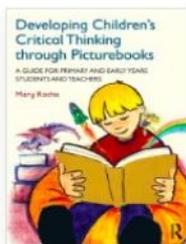


Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers

1st Edition

By **Bernie Sullivan, Máirín Glenn, Mary Roche, Caitriona McDonagh**

Paperback – [2016-04-28](#)
Routledge



Developing Children's Critical Thinking through Picturebooks

A guide for primary and early years students and teachers, 1st Edition

By **Mary Roche**

Paperback – [2014-06-22](#)
Routledge

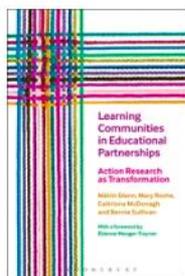


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Paperback – [2011-11-03](#)
Routledge



Learning Communities in Educational Partnerships Action Research as Transformation

By **Máirín Glenn, Mary Roche, Caitriona McDonagh and Bernie Sullivan**

Published: 16-11-2017
Imprint: Bloomsbury Academic

The sources include digital visual data for clarifying the meanings of the embodied values expressed by educational practitioners and used as explanatory principles in their explanations of educational influence. These data include the relationally dynamic values and connections expressed between participants through the virtual ZOOM conferences (Whitehead, et al. 2021) stimulated by the coronavirus pandemic. They include contributions to the American Educational Research Association (Whitehead et al, 2021)

(d) Key findings

The key findings are focused on the nature of the unique constellations of relationally dynamic values that are used by educational practitioners as explanatory principles to explain their educational influences in learning in their continuing professional development. The implications of the findings for the continuing professional development of educational practitioners and professional organisations such as ESAI are focused on:

- i) The accreditation and support of Living Educational Theory research masters programmes for the continuing professional development of educational practitioners.
- ii) The recognition of these masters programmes, by professional organisations such as ESAI, as contributing to the generation of a profession of master and doctor educators.

- iii) The provision of continuing professional development for academics in higher education who are tutoring Living Educational Theory research masters programmes. This professional development must include their developing competences to support the clarification and use of the unique constellation of the values of human flourishing that are being expressed and researched in the continuing professional development of educational practitioners. This research includes the use of these values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings.
- iv) The development of global networks of Living Educational Theorists for generating and sustaining connections with other educational practitioners with a commitment to human flourishing purpose and place through Living Educational Theory research.

The implications include the generation of a global movement of Living Educational Theory researchers that carries hope for human flourishing (Burgess, Whitehead & Huxtable, 2020; Whitehead et al. 2021).

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