

**I believe that researching our own practice should achieve equal academic status and credibility to third person forms of research. What am I doing about it?**

Jack Whitehead, Liverpool Hope University and The University of Cumbria.

A discussion paper for the Colloquium at Liverpool Hope University 24-27 July 2012 on Researching Our Own Practice.

My main reason, for claiming that researching our own practice should achieve equal academic status and credibility to third person forms of research, is focused on the validity of explanations for the educational influences of an individual in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. The claim about equal academic status is grounded in a relationship between reflections on my educational practice in some 46 years of professional engagement as an educator in which I have explained the growth of my educational knowledge in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and my understanding of ideas in theories from disciplines of education such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history and theology of education and fields of education such as leadership, politics, economics and management, in my professional engagements as an educational researcher.

My early reflections on this relationship evolved through my work as a science teacher in London Comprehensive Schools between 1967-73 and my studies of educational theory for the Academic Diploma in the Philosophy and Psychology of Education at the Institute of Education of the University of London between 1968-70 which were followed by the MA in the psychology of education 1970-72. The dominant view of educational theory in these courses was that it was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. The theories in these disciplines were all presented in the language of the third person with abstract concepts that eliminated 'I' as a living contradiction from the theoretical discourse.

Not only did the theories eliminate 'I', as a living contradiction from explanations, they eliminated the practical principles I used to

explain my educational influences in my own learning and in the learning of my students. Paul Hirst described the mistake of replacing the practical principles that teachers used to explain their educational influences in his recognition that in the disciplined approach to educational theory the practical principles of practitioners were regarded as:

...at best pragmatic maxims have a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental theoretical justification. (Hirst, 1983, p. 18)

It was this error that refocused my sense of vocation in education from that of a science teacher committed to helping my pupils to develop their scientific understanding to that of an educational researcher committed to contributing to the production of valid forms of educational theory.

I distinguish between **education** researchers who conduct their research within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education and **educational** researchers who are produced valid explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work and research.

As I write I am aware of a lack of equity between education researchers who present their knowledge in international refereed journals, within the propositional forms of third person research, and educational researchers who may wish to present their knowledge within first person multi-media narratives that have equal status to the outlets available for education researchers. We are however limited by the very few multi-media publications that have equal recognition to the print-based journals. I want to emphasize that the knowledge-claims of educational researchers that include 'I' enquiries, and have been accredited for masters and doctoral degrees, have all had to demonstrate the inclusion of insights from third person theories. You can access the evidence for this claim in the doctoral theses and masters dissertations at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>

and

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>

My claim about equal academic status is grounded in the following two claims about the nature of third person statements in relation to a valid explanation for the educational influences of an individual in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work and research.

The first claim is that third person statements in general, abide by the Aristotelean Law of Contradiction which removes contradictions between statements from correct theory (Popper, 1963, p. 317). I have integrated many insights in my understanding of myself and the world from such third person theories. However, what these theories cannot do, either individually or taken in any combination is to produce a valid explanation of my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which I live, work and research. I believe that this is also true of your own life, but I am open to you showing that this believe is mistaken.

The second claim is that each individual has the capacity to produce these valid explanations of their educational influence in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' which integrate insights from third person theories.

The above case that researching our own practice 'should' achieve equal academic status and credibility to third person forms of research is easy for me to make. However, the 'should' for me contains a motivating value. Given that my case is justified and that researching our own practice 'should' achieve equal academic status and credibility, what am I doing about it?

Here are five recent activities in which I am exploring the implications of asking the 'should' in the above claim, in 'What am I doing about it?'

- i) a five day workshop on action research in Thailand (20-24 June 2013) (See the What's New section of <http://www.actionreseach.net> where I am encouraging the creation of living-educational-theories in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?')
- ii) a keynote in Mauritius on living-educational-theory and

action research

[http://www.youtube.com/edit?ns=1&video\\_id=kkrnVEvHNXg](http://www.youtube.com/edit?ns=1&video_id=kkrnVEvHNXg)

- iii) a keynote on Theory and Practice at the Sixth International Conference On Teacher Education, in Israel (4 July 2013)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGsHTDna3i4> where I am highlighting the importance of multi-media narratives in generating one's living-educational theory.
- iv) a presentation on living-educational-theory at Oranim College in Israel (8 July 2013)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0lvF0NcLdE>
- v) a presentation on multi-media narratives at Oranim College in Israel (8 July 2013)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgv6ghntboo>

Whilst I am clear that the knowledge being generated from researching our own practice should achieve equal academic status and credibility to third person forms of research, I believe that this status will be influenced by the quality of the knowledge we create from researching our own practice, in relation to its originality and validity. That is why I stress the importance of using Habermas' (1976, p. 2-3) four criteria of social validity in enhancing the validity of the explanations of our educational influences in learning. Using these four criteria we can strengthen the comprehensibility, the evidence, the understanding of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in our practice and writings, and the authenticity of our explanations in showing over time and interaction that we are truly committed to living as fully as possible the values that we claim give meaning and purpose to our lives.

Of the 5 activities list above, because of a limited number of words for the discussion paper, I shall focus on my keynote and response, to the contributions to the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Teacher Education (2013) held at the David Yellin Academic College of Education and the Mofet Institute between July 2-4 2013, and my response to contributions to *Teacher Educators As Members Of An Evolving Profession* (Ben-Peretz, 2013) – a book jointly published with the Mofet Institute.

The Mofet Institute is a national intercollegial center for research and professional development in teacher education, in Tel Aviv, Israel. The Institute has developed various channels of action including a Writing Channel:

The range of writing frameworks aims to encourage teacher educators to transform their personal theoretical and practical knowledge into public knowledge that is available to the community of educators in the teacher education colleges and in the field. (Mofet Institute 2013)

In the five activities above I explain, to the various audiences in international contexts, what I am meaning by a living-educational-theory. I also explain how multi-media narratives can communicate the meanings of the energy-flowing values that individuals use as explanatory principles in explanations of their educational influence.

In exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering my question, 'What am I doing about it?' in relation to establishing equity between researching our own practice and third person forms of research, I am drawing attention to a living-theory, multi-media writing framework that has been used by teacher educators and other professionals to transform their personal theoretical and practice knowledge into public knowledge. This 'drawing attention' to can perhaps be clearly seen in the keynote to the international conference at:

- i) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGsHTDna3i4> where I am highlighting the importance of multi-media narratives in generating one's living-educational theory.
- ii) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0lvF0NcLdE> - the presentation on living-educational-theory at Oranim College in Israel (8 July 2013)
- iii) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgv6ghntboo> - the presentation on multi-media narratives at Oranim College in Israel (8 July 2013)

By drawing attention to the potential of living-educational-theories and multi-media narratives to contribute to the development of

equity between researching our own practice and third person forms of research, I hope to promote the inclusion of this potential in the writing channel of the Mofet Institute and other organizations around the world.

The importance of this inclusion can be appreciated by a browsing through the Conference Program of the International Conference. It contains some 218 sessions with 505 contributions.

The titles of the large majority of Abstracts and all of the titles of the sessions under which individual presentations are grouped are third person statements. There are 12 titles in which the 'I', 'My' or 'We' appears which distinguish researching own practice from third person research.

There are no titles in the form of questions in which an individual teacher educator is asking, researching and answering a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' Hence there are no contributions which explain an individual teacher-educator's educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which he or she lives, works and researchers.

Pointing out this omission is not to criticize the International Conference. It was a most impressive conference, very well organized, with attentive hosting and great care for the well-being of participants. My intention is to suggest a possibility for opening up extended opportunities in the Writing Channel and for Academic Writing, than were present in the Conference.

I wish to make a similar point about the third person research in the book presented to the Conference: Ben-Peretz, M. (Ed.) (2013) *Teacher Educators as members of an Evolving Profession*. New York; Rowman & Littlefield Education in Partnership with Israel; The Mofet Institute. This printed-text based medium of communication supports the communication of third person forms of research. It contains insights from internationally recognized researchers in the field of teacher education. However, it omits the multi-media representations that can communicate the energy-flow values that I am claiming are necessary for a valid explanation of an individuals educational influence in learning.

Whilst I am claiming that third person research is necessary to the

development of living-educational-theories, it is not sufficient to generate valid explanations for the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, research and work. Drawing on the evidence in the Living Theory section of <http://www.actionresearch.net> I claim that living-educational-theories with multi-media narratives that draw insights from third person research is both necessary and sufficient to fulfill an aim of the Writing Channel of the Mofet Institute to transform personal theoretical and practical knowledge into public knowledge.

## References

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