

## **How do I help students to find their first person voice in living-theories?**

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The first action research report I produced that helped others to find their first person voice emerged from the responses of a group of teachers I was working with to a report I'd written, which denied their voices. In 1976 I worked with a group of six teachers on a Schools Council funded Mixed Ability Exercise to improve learning for 11-14 year olds in mixed ability science groups. In March 1976 I produced an evaluation report that explained the educational influences of the teachers in their pupils' learning in terms of the most advanced social theories and models of the day. These included models of change in the teacher-learning process, a democratic model of evaluation, and a theory of innovation. On showing the report to academic colleagues they commented favourable on my use of the academic models in the explanation. On showing the report to the teachers I was working with, all six commented that they understood the report, but could not see themselves in it. As soon as they made this criticism, I recognized that I had eliminated the voices of those I had worked with, with their own explanatory principles and replaced them with the conceptual theories and models of others. The teachers asked me to return to the data I had collected over the previous 12 months and produce a different report within which they could see themselves. Working with Paul Hunt a former PGCE student of mine who was in his first year of teaching in one of the three project schools, I returned to the video-tapes, transcriptions of audio taped conversations with pupils and teachers, and copies of the learning resources produced for the pupils, together with copies of the pupils' work.

On showing this second report to the teachers, they all agreed that this was a valid explanation of their educational influences in the project. This report marks my explication of the use of an action-reflection cycle in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice in my professional context?'

I am asking, researching and answering the question, 'How do I help students to find their first person voice in living theories?' from my professional engagement over some 40 years with the continuing professional development of teachers.

My awareness of the importance of helping students to find their first person voice emerged from my early experiences in my own continuing professional development which constrained the emergence of my own voice. I experienced these constraints in my studies of educational theory at the Institute of Education of the University of London during my studies for the Academic Diploma in Education between 1968-70. At the time of the award of the Diploma I accepted the view of educational theory known as the disciplines approach in which it was claimed that educational theory was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. During the course I benefitted from a group of highly motivated academics who were also inspirational teachers. They were passionate about their disciplines and I remain a student of the most advanced philosophical and social science theories of the day.

In 1970 I moved on from the Academic Diploma Course into a part-time Masters of Education programme in the psychology of education, whilst a full time science teacher and Head of the Science Department at Erkenwald Comprehensive School in Barking, London. It was whilst conducting a controlled experimental design with a focus on a 'Preliminary investigation of the processes through which adolescents acquire scientific understanding', with the Science Department that I began to question the assumptions in the disciplines approach to educational theory. Whilst carrying out the investigation I began to appreciate that the methods and underlying assumptions of my enquiry, were not getting me closer to answering my question, 'How do I help my pupils to improve their scientific understanding?' What I was doing was testing the validity of Piaget's Cognitive Stage Theory and Blooms Taxonomy. In retrospect I should have understood that my tutors, as psychologists of education would be focused on developing theories in the psychology of education, rather than focused on support my exploration of the implications of asking, researching and answering my question, 'How do I help my pupils to improve their scientific understandings?'.

On receiving my MA degree in 1972 I knew that there was something wrong with the dominant disciplines approach to education. I knew that what was wrong was something about the denial of the significance of my own voice, my own 'I' in explaining my educational influence in my enquiry. In 1983 Paul Hirst, one of the proponents of the disciplines approach, acknowledged the following mistake with a clarity that enabled me to articulate what I had known in an intuitive and embodied sense was wrong with the disciplines

approach to educational theory. Hirst said that much understanding of educational theory will be developed:

... in the context of immediate practical experience and will be co-terminous with everyday understanding. In particular, many of its operational principles, both explicit and implicit, will be of their nature generalisations from practical experience and have as their justification the results of individual activities and practices.

In many characterisations of educational theory, my own included, principles justified in this way have until recently been regarded as at best pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental, theoretical justification. That now seems to me to be a mistake. Rationally defensible practical principles, I suggest, must of their nature stand up to such practical tests and without that are necessarily inadequate. (p. 18)

The crucial mistake was in failing to recognise the importance of the first person voice in articulating the practical principles used by an individual to explain their educational influences in learning.

My early use of video-recordings also helped me to focus on overcoming the denial of the first person voice of my students. This was in the context of my teaching science to 11-18 years, believing in enquiry learning in which pupils posed their own question, and watching video-tapes of my classrooms in which I could see myself giving my pupils the questions to answer rather than encouraging them to form their own questions and then to make a response. On watching the video tapes of my lessons I experienced myself, my 'I' as a living contradiction in the sense that I held together my valuing of enquiry learning together with its negations.

So, my valuing of first person student voice emerged from experiences that denied the value of my own and from seeing myself on video, denying the first person voice of my students.

There is much evidence from the 40 years since 1973 that I know how to help students to find their first person voice in living-theories. You can access much of this evidence in the students' own voices from the 'living

theory theses' and 'master educators' writings' sections of <http://www.actionresearch.net> . The contents of the September 2013 issue of Gifted Education International are provided by former students of mine from their successfully completed masters and doctoral enquiries and you can see how the 'I' or 'my' of the first person voice are included in the first person questioning:

Sage Online First has published the following papers before the print version is published later in 2013 in Gifted Education International. The copyright regulations mean that we can circulate the papers that were first submitted to Gifted Education International, before the editing. With the exception of the Whitehead and Huxtable contribution, all the papers were submitted successfully for masters credit for the Gifts and Talents in Education Unit of the University of Bath. The Whitehead and Huxtable paper outlines our approach to tutoring on the unit with the creation of living-educational-theories as transformational continuing professional development:

Marie Huxtable and Jack Whitehead – Editors Introduction.

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/mhjwGEI1212intro.pdf>

Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable

Living educational theory research as transformational continuing professional development

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmhGEIarticle141012.pdf>

Amy Skuse

How have I developed my own personal views of gifts and talents in education and how does this influence what I do in the classroom?

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/module/amyskusegandtined010110.pdf>

Vicky M Tucker

How my involvement with an inclusive, educational, gifted and talented programme has influenced my work with students who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/vickytuckerg&t.pdf>

Louise Cripps

How can I clarify my responsibility as a headteacher as I provide opportunities to enable all children in the school to create talents?

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/crippslgandta0809.pdf>

Sally Cartwright

How can I enable the gifts and talents of my students to be in the driving seat of their learning?

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/scgandtnov08.pdf>

Joy Mounter

How can I work within the government's perspective of 'Gifted and Talented' but still remain true to my own living values?

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/jmgt2008opt.pdf>

Ros Hurford

How does using philosophy and creative thinking enable me to recognise and develop inclusive gifts and talents in my pupils?

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/roshurfordg&t.pdf>

Having provided evidence that I know, in a practical sense, how to help students to find their first person voice in living-theories, I shall now offer an explanation of how I do it.

### **Explaining how I help students to find their first person voice in their living-theories.**

The explanation I have in mind must be a valid explanation of my educational influences in the learning of my students as they generate and share their explanations of their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of their students.

My explanation has ontological, methodological and epistemological components that are distinct but not discrete in that they are dynamically related in what I am doing in the following ways.

#### **Ontology**

To explain how I do what I do in terms of my ontology I think Erich Fromm's and Martin Buber's influence must be acknowledged. Throughout my working life, beginning in 1967, I have been influenced by Fromm's (1960, p. 18) insight that if a person can face the truth without panic they will realise that there is no purpose to life other than the one they give to

their lives through their loving relationships and productive work. I love what I do in education in the sense that I have found meaning and purpose in supporting learning in myself and others that carries hope for the future of humanity. I am sure that there are many interpretations of the meaning of 'love' in the idea of 'loving what I am doing'. In working with Liz Campbell (Campbell, DeLong, Griffin & Whitehead, 2013) I share her understanding of love, from the work of Peck (1978):

I begin each course by telling my students I love them and before they get too uncomfortable with the idea, I share Scott Peck's definition of love to explain what I mean. Love according to Peck (1978) is, "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of one's own or another's spiritual growth." (p.85) Immediately, I see my students relax a little as they process this definition of love. I wait a few minutes...often someone asks what I mean by spiritual and then I explain that I use the term spiritual according to the definition bell hooks provides, "one who seeks to know and live according to values that promote universal well-being" (2001, p.19). (Campbell, 2013, p. )

I also use the idea of 'spiritual' in terms of values that promote universal well-being. Since engaging with the ideas of Martin Buber on my initial teacher education course in 1966-67 I have been influenced by his understanding of the 'humility' of the educator and of a distinction he draws between the egotistical 'I' and the 'I' in the 'I-You' relationship. What I believe I express in my educational relationships is the humility that enables a student to recognise that I value their particular being as having priority over my own embodied and propositional knowledge:

"If this educator should ever believe that for the sake of education he has to practise selection and arrangement, then he will be guided by another criterion than that of inclination, however legitimate this may be in its own sphere; he will be guided by the recognition of values which is in his glance as an educator. But even then his selection remains suspended, under constant correction by the special humility of the educator for whom the life and particular being of all his pupils is the decisive factor to which his 'hierarchical' recognition is subordinated." (Buber, 1947, p. 122)

I believe that a form of 'I-You' relationship is at the heart of my educational relationship. Whilst I own my introduction to 'I-You' relationships to the

work of Martin Buber, I know that Buber, as a Jewish theologian is including a theistic spiritual commitment within his idea of 'I-You' relationships. I am using 'I' within my humanistic experience and understanding of 'I-You' relationships:

"How much of a person a man is depends on how strong the I of the basic word I-You is in the human duality of his I.

The way he says I - what he means when he says I - decides where a man belongs and where he goes. The word "I" is the true shibboleth of humanity.

Listen to it!

How dissonant the I of the ego sounds! When it issues from tragic lips, tense with some self-contradiction that they try to hold back, it can move us to great pity. When it issues from chaotic lips that savagely, heedlessly, unconsciously represent contradiction, it can make us shudder. When the lips are vain and smooth, it sounds embarrassing or disgusting.

Those who pronounce the severed I, wallowing in the capital letter, uncover the shame of the world spirit that has been debased to mere spirituality.

But how beautiful and legitimate the vivid and emphatic I of Socrates sounds! It is the I of infinite conversation, and the air of conversation is present on all its ways, even before his judges, even in the final hour in prison. This I lived in that relation to man which is embodied in conversation. It believed in the actuality of men and went out toward them. Thus it stood together with them in actuality and is never severed from it. Even solitude cannot spell forsakenness, and when the human world falls silent for him, he hears his daimonion say You.

How beautiful and legitimate the full I of Goethe sounds! It is the I of pure intercourse with nature. Nature yields to it and speaks ceaselessly with it; she reveals here mysteries to it and yet does not betray her mystery. It believes in her and says to the rose: "So it is You" - and at once shares the same actuality with the rose. Hence, when it returns to itself, the spirit of actuality stays with it; the vision of the sun clings to

the blessed eye that recalls its own likeness to the sun, and the friendship of the elements accompanies man into the calm of dying and rebirth.

Thus the "adequate, true, and pure" I-saying of the representatives of association, the Socratic and the Goethean persons, resounds through the ages. (Buber, 1970, p. 117)

I began my initial teacher education programme in the Department of Education at Newcastle University in 1966 in the UK with an ontological valuing of a flow of life-affirming energy that I know is at the heart of my finding meaning and purpose in my existence. Many of my students (Pound, Laidlaw, Huxtable, 2009) have acknowledged that they have experienced the influence of this flow of life-affirming energy. Paul Tillich has helped me to express the ontological significance of this flow of energy when he writes about being affirmed by the 'power of being-itself':

Faith is not a theoretical affirmation of something uncertain, it is the existential acceptance of something transcending ordinary experience. Faith is not an opinion but a state. It is the state of being grasped by the power of being which transcends everything that is and in which everything that is participates. He who is grasped by this power is able to affirm himself because he knows that he is affirmed by the power of being-itself. In this point mystical experience and personal encounter are identical. In both of them faith is the basis of the courage to be. (Tillich, 1962, p,168)

Tillich's meaning is expressing a theistic commitment to his Catholic theology. My humanistic experience and expression of a life-affirming energy is cosmological rather than theological. By this I mean that I identify the ground of a flow of life-affirming energy with a source outside myself whose genesis whilst a mystery, I feel with gratitude as it continues to flow through me. Whilst aware of the significance of this life-affirming in explaining what I do, I am also aware of Vasilyuk's point from his 'Energy-paradigm' that researchers know little about the relationships between energy and meaning and energy and value. Vasilyuk says that we know how 'energetically' a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the



ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics. I agree with Vasilyuk that researchers only have a weak understanding of the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although as he says it is obvious that in fact there are certain links (Vasilyuk, 1991, p. 64).

Drawing your attention to the embodied expressions of meanings of energy-flowing values, which are being included in digitalised multi-media explanations of my educational influences in learning, I intend to justify my claim to have produced a valid explanation of how I help students to find their first person voices in their living-theories.

I have also been helped to explain my educational influences in the learning of my students by the original contributions to knowledge of my students that focus on ontology in the sense of a theory of being. For example, I believe that I can explain how I help my students to find their first person voice through expressing the ontological values of ‘presencing empathetic responsiveness’ and ‘presencing developmental possibilities’. Keith Kinsella (2012) introduced me to these two values in his doctoral research and they are helping me to explain what I do.

Presencing is a term coined by Scharmer (2005) combining the words 'present' and 'sense' to convey the action of bringing into present reality a vision/idea from the future. (Kinsella, 2012, Abstract)

In explaining my educational influence in the learning of others I use a research method that responds to digitalised visual data with ‘empathetic resonance’

I first encountered the idea of empathetic resonance in the writings of Sardello (2008). For Sardello, *empathetic resonance*, is the resonance of the individual soul coming into resonance with the Soul of the World (p. 13). Sardellos’ meaning carries a religious commitment. I am using *empathetic resonance* from my humanistic perspective to communicate a feeling of the immediate presence of the other in expressing the living values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life.

The method of ‘empathetic resonance’ involves the use of digitalised visual data of one’s practice. The cursor is moved backwards and forwards, smoothly, along the clip to find places where the embodied expressions on

the video evoke the strongest empathetic response. The movement of the cursor, backwards and forwards from this point give the antecedents of the expression and the subsequent expressions in their social context. This is helpful in clarifying the meanings of embodied values as they emerge in practice. Huxtable (2009) has explained this process in more detail and used it within her own doctoral enquiry (Huxtable, 2012). This process of clarifying meanings from their embodied expressions is very different to my initial training in the British Analytic School of Philosophy where the meanings of word were clarified in relation to the meanings of other words. The difference can be understand and a difference between lexical definitions of meanings where the meanings of words are defined in terms of other words and the ostensive expression of meanings where embodied expressions are clarified with the help of both language and visual data, in the course of their emergence in practice. This process of clarifying the means of energy-flowing embodied values as explanatory principles is related to the methodologies of living-theories (Whitehead, 2009).

## Methodology

Methodologically I use Dadds' and Hart's (2001) insight about methodological inventiveness which stresses the importance of each individual's capacity to find their own methodology for exploring the implications of their questions. Dadds and Hart explain that perhaps the most important new insight has been the awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. They point to the importance of understanding that how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes. (Dadds & Hart, p. 166, 2001). In stressing the importance of the methodological inventiveness of each practitioner-researcher they say:

So what genuinely matters are the purposes of practice which the research seeks to serve, and the integrity with which the practitioner researcher makes methodological choices about ways of achieving those purposes. No methodology is, or should, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques... (Dadds & Hart, p. 169, 2001)

Hence, in explaining how I support students in finding their first person voice in their living-theories I want to stress that my responses to each student are unique in being guided by their own responses as they are exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering their own question of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ In saying that the methodology in each living-theory is unique does not mean that there are no general principles that can be used to guide the generation of each living-theory methodology. Some of these principles are intimately related to the above ontology and the epistemology below that stresses the importance of ensuring the validity of the explanations, of clarifying the meanings of the energy-flowing values that can constitute both explanatory principles and living standards of judgment and of ensuring that the living-logics of the explanations clarify for a reader the mode of thought used by the researching for comprehending their explanation as rational.

## Epistemology

Epistemologically I stress the significance of each individual as a knowledge-creator in their enquiry, with the capacity to explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations, into the Academy as legitimated knowledge.

This paper examines the concept of *empathetic validity*, that is, the potential of practitioner research in its processes and outcomes to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, such that greater empathy and regard are created. The paper argues that practitioner research that is high in empathetic validity contributes to positive human relationships and, as such, is an important form of research in an age of increasing violence as well as stress and tension in the workplace. The paper makes a distinction between internal empathetic validity (that which changes the practitioner researcher and research beneficiaries) and external empathetic validity (that which influences audiences with whom the practitioner research is shared). (Dadds, 2008, p. 279)

I offer two dimensions. I distinguish between internal empathetic validity (that which changes the practitioner researcher and research participants) and external empathetic validity (that which influences audiences with whom the practitioner research is shared). I take ‘empathy’ to refer to the human capacity to identify oneself with the feelings, experiences and perspectives of other people such that one tries genuinely to

see and feel the world through their eyes, hearts and minds. In this sense, empathy enables people to be ‘connected knowers’ who ‘learn through empathy’ (Belenky et al. 1986, 115). Connected knowers ‘learn to get out from behind their own eyes and use a different lens ... the lens of another person’ (ibid., 115). Empathy has two sides to the same coin. First, it may involve a psychological reaching out towards the other person and second, it may involve a psychological act of receiving the spirit of the other person into oneself (Belenky et al. 1986, 122). When we are seeking to empathise with others, therefore, we try to step inside their shoes and we also open our heart and mind to absorbing their reality into our own understanding. Empathy is the opposite of geocentricism, in which we are able only to see and understand the world in a monolithic way – as we ourselves see it. (p.280).

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression (*verständlich*) so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true (*wahr*) proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully (*wahrhaftig*) so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right (*richtig*) so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified.” (Habermas, 1976, pp. 2-3)

*First the practical problem: Today there is as much variation among qualitative researchers as there is between qualitative and quantitatively orientated scholars. Anyone doubting this claim need only compare Miles and Huberman’s (1994) relatively traditional conception of validity < ‘The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their ‘confirmability’ – that is, their validity’ (p.11)> with Lather’s discussion of ironic validity:*

*“Contrary to dominant validity practices where the rhetorical nature of scientific claims is masked with methodological assurances, a strategy of ironic validity proliferates forms, recognizing that they are rhetorical and without foundation, postepistemic, lacking in epistemological support. The*

*text is resituated as a representation of its 'failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach.... (Lather, 1994, p. 40-41)'. ” (Donmoyer, 1996 p.21.)*

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