

Preparing a living educational theory, action research proposal, for submission to a university research committee for a doctoral research programme.

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Introduction

Doctoral theses are often judged in terms of criteria of originality of mind and critical judgment, the extent and merit of the work and matter worthy of publication. A research committee considering a proposal for a doctoral research programme will want to be satisfied that the research programme is likely to make a contribution to knowledge that is appropriate for a doctoral degree. Research committees usually want to be satisfied that the:

- i) research is contextualised appropriately within educational research
- ii) research focus and questions are clear.
- iii) proposed methodology is appropriate for the enquiry
- iv) theoretical framework is comprehensible and related to up to date literature
- v) data gathering and analyses are rigorous and valid
- vi) research programme has educational significance in relation to knowledge creation and/or policy and/or practice.

Contextualising a research programme in relation to living theory educational research.

Associations of educational researchers such as the British Educational Research Association are often made up of researchers with diverse interests. They contain researchers whose research is grounded in the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of disciplines such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. They include researchers in the politics, economics, theology, leadership and management of education who are seeking to contribute to knowledge in these fields of enquiry. All of the above researchers I refer to as education researchers. I distinguish education researchers from educational researchers. I use the term educational researchers to refer to those researchers who are generating educational theories that can explain their educational influences in their own learning and/or in the learning of others and/or in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work. The significance of making a clear distinction between education research and educational research had been made by Whitty (2005) in his 2005 Presidential Address to BERA. I have included his point in the notes.

The book *Action Research Living Theory* (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) addresses many issues you could encounter in making your own original contribution to educational knowledge through the generation of your living educational theory. I believe that you could exercise your originality in making a contribution to the standards of judgment that are appropriate for assessing the quality and validity of practice-based educational research. You could contextualise such a contribution in relation to the Furlong and Oancea (2005) framework for discussing questions of assessing quality in applied and practice-based educational research.

Clarity of Research Focus and Questions

Questions of the kind 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional context?' usually provide a focus for living theory action research. Your questions will be uniquely yours and focused on making explicit the knowledge embodied in your professional practice as you explore the implications of asking, researching and answering your practical questions. I know it may sound strange to say that the question(s) your thesis answer is usually the last insight that emerges in a research programme. This is true in my experience of supervising to successful completion over 20 doctorates over the past ten years. So, the question you ask at the beginning of your research is rarely the one your thesis answers because of the growth of your educational knowledge and understandings of the significance of your questions, in the course of your enquiry. For example, looking at over 20 doctorates with their titles, abstracts and contents accessible at <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/living.shtml> may help in the formation of your own question but the title of the doctoral thesis was the last insight to emerge in the writing up of the research. The crucial point in preparing your research proposal is to focus your question on an issue of practical concern in your professional practice that strongly connects with what really matters to you. This should ensure that you focus on the values that will sustain your motivation through your enquiry to a successful submission. It is also important to form your question in a way that connects to your knowledge-creation. Action research includes both a focus on improving practice and a focus on knowledge-creation through theory generation and testing. Because of this it is important that readers and assessors of your research proposal understand both the practical context of your enquiry and the potential contribution to educational knowledge. The potential significance of your contribution to educational knowledge can be highlighted in sections dealing with issues of methodology, theoretical framework, data gathering, validating and relatability to other ideas in the research literature.

Methodology and Methods

In justifying your choice of a living theory action research methodology you might draw on Cunningham's (1999) justification for his choice of this approach. I think he gives good reasons for his choice in the Appendix of his doctoral thesis and you can access this on-line. You could also explain your choice in relation to the ideas in Action Research Living Theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

In my thinking about methodology and methods I always bear in mind Gilbert Ryle's point about the intellectualist legend because it serves to prevent me from imposing any totalising idea in my choice of research methodology:

"Efficient practice precedes the theory of it; methodologies presuppose the application of the methods, of the critical investigation of which they are the products. It was because Aristotle found himself and others now intelligently and now stupidly and it was because Izaak Walton found himself and others angling sometimes effectively and sometimes ineffectively that both were able to give to their pupils the maxims and prescriptions of their arts. It is therefore possible for people intelligently to perform some sorts of operations when they are not yet able to consider any propositions enjoining how they should be performed. Some intelligent

performances are not controlled by an interior acknowledgements of the principles applied in them.

The crucial objection to the intellectualist legend is this. The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle." (Ryle, p. 31, 1973)

This is why I stress the importance of Marian Dadds' and Susan Hart's insight about practitioner-researchers and their methodological inventiveness in recognising the importance of the creativity of the researcher in generating a methodology in the process of enquiry:

" The importance of methodological inventiveness

Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. We had understood for many years that substantive choice was fundamental to the motivation and effectiveness of practitioner research (Dadds 1995); that what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well 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)

If our aim is to create conditions that facilitate methodological inventiveness, we need to ensure as far as possible that our pedagogical approaches match the message that we seek to communicate. More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage of practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care. Practitioner research methodologies are with us to serve professional practices. 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, be cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods or techniques. (Dadds & Hart, p. 169, 2001)

In writing a section about methodology and methods for a living theory action research doctoral proposal, I would also stress the importance of narrative enquiry. The 2006 Handbook of Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2006) is a good resource and Jean McNiff's (2006) chapter on 'My Story is my Living Educational Theory', explains the importance of narrative in the generation of a living educational theory. You might find useful the paper on 'Using a living theory methodology in improving educational practice' (Whitehead, 2008 - <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/jwLTM080508.pdf>)

Theoretical Framework

The central principle in generating living educational theories is that they are explanations of the educational influence of the individual in their own learning, and/or in the learning of others and/or in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work. In explaining educational influences in learning, especially in relation to the learning of social formations these explanations should engage with Noffke's 1997 criticism:

"As vital as such a process of self-awareness is to identifying the contradictions between one's espoused theories and one's practices, perhaps because of its focus on individual learning, it only begins to address the social basis of personal belief systems. While such efforts can further a kind of collective agency (McNiff, 1988), it is a sense of agency built on ideas of society as a collection of autonomous individuals. As such, it seems incapable of addressing social issues in terms of the interconnections between personal identity and the claim of experiential knowledge, as well as power and privilege in society." (Noffke, 1997, p. 329)

One of the many ways in which the theoretical framework of living theories can meet Noffke's criticism is by drawing on insights from social theories such as those offered by Habermas (1976, 1987, 2002) and Bernstein (2000), from a perspective of inclusionality developed by Rayner (2006). Inclusionality is a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries that is connective, reflexive and co-creative. With such an awareness you can explain how your agency is constrained or enabled by the power relations in the socio-historical and socio-cultural systems that influence the political, economic (Sen, 1999) and cultural formations (Said, 1993) in which you live and work. You can also explain your educational influence (Said, 1987) in the learning of these social formations.

Some individuals may like to draw on more revolutionary theoretical social frameworks in generating their living educational theories and I like to recommend Fassbinder's (2006) review of Peter McLaren's revolutionary critical pedagogy for those who wish to integrate this kind of theoretical perspective into their proposal.

McLaren's idea of technique is discussed at length in an essay in Capitalists and Conquerors:

Revolutionary critical pedagogy begins with a three-pronged approach: First, students engage in a pedagogy of demystification centering around a semiotics of recognition, where dominant sign systems are recognized and denaturalized, where common sense is historicized, and where signification is understood as a political practice that refracts rather than reflects reality, where cultural formations are understood in relation to the larger social factory of the school and the global universe of capital. This is followed by a pedagogy of opposition, where students engage in analyzing various political systems, ideologies, and histories, and eventually students begin to develop their own political positions. Inspired by a sense of ever-imminent hope, students take up a pedagogy of revolution, where deliberative practices for transforming the social universe of capital are developed and put into practice. (p. 59) (Fassbinder, 2006, <http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev499.htm>)

Data Gathering and Analysis

In generating and evaluating your living educational theory the issues of data gathering and analysis are focused on two questions in the action reflection process.

- i) What data am I going to gather to enable me to make a judgment about the educational influences in learning of what I am doing in relation to my values, skills and understandings?
- ii) In explaining my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations what explanatory principles and theoretical frameworks do I use?

The enquiry processes that characterise a living theory approach to questions of the kind, 'how do I improve what I am doing?' are moved by a desire to live the values that give meaning and purpose to one's existence, as fully as one can. The experience of 'I' as a living contradiction, in the sense of holding together these values in the recognition that there are aspects of practice in which they are denied, stimulates the imagination to generate possible futures in action plans in which the values are lived more fully in practice. In action reflection cycles motivated by values, individuals act to realise their values and gather data to enable an evidence-based judgment to be made on the influences of the actions. The data can take many forms and the data gathering use a range of research methods, depending on the educational influence one is seeking to understand. The range can include results from standardised tests, interviews, observations, conversations, audio, photographic and video recordings, and transcript material. It can also include previously produced narratives of learning. An evidence-based explanatory of learning offered earlier in the research, can become data in constructing a later explanation. The term 'Triangulation of Data' is sometimes used in action research. This emphasises the wisdom of not relying on one data source but as the name implies, gathering data using three different methods.

So, in producing your research proposal, look carefully at the question(s) you are seeking to answer and connect your data gathering to the data you believe that you will need to produce an evidence-based explanation of your educational influences in learning. If, for example, you are seeking to improve your practice in relation to students' learning in a particular curriculum, it would be wise to include data that is focused on students' learning. Because you are seeking to understand your educational influences in learning, and these explanations are values-based, it would be wise to gather video data of what you are doing in your educational relationships with your students. As much learning takes place through dialogue and reflection, it would be wise to gather data that is focused on your responsive relationships to your students in which you are focusing on responding to what you perceive as their learning needs. As your educational influences in your students' learning (or in the learning of others) require a creative response from your students in their learning, and in relation to what you are doing, it would be wise to gather data with your students and, with ethical approvals, to encourage anyone who is collaborating with you in the research, to produce their narratives of their learning, that might be useful to you in the constructions of your own.

In analysing your data, you are seeking to produce a valid explanation of your educational influences in learning. Explanations require explanatory principles and in explaining your

educational influences in learning in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I have focused on the motivating power of the values you use to give meaning and purpose to your lives as explanatory principles. Each individual has their own unique constellation of values that constitute their explanations of educational influences in learning. You can access such explanations in the 'master educators' programmes' and 'living theory sections' of <http://www.actionresearch.net>.

There is an important relationship, in any analysis of educational influences in learning, that connects the freedom of the individual to act in whatever way they choose, to the enabling and constraining influences of psychodynamic, sociohistorical and sociocultural power relations. Research into mental health suggests that many individuals have psychopathologies of one form or another, that can drag the individual and others down into a vortex of disabling responses. I imagine that you have encountered such individuals and that we may recognise such tendencies in ourselves !

In analysing one's educational influence in one's own learning it could be valuable to others, as well as oneself, to explain the psychodynamics of the processes through which one continues to express one's life-affirming energy and productive sense of well-being. Similarly, in explaining one's educational influence in learning in particular social context, there will be socio-historical and socio-cultural power relations at work that serve to reproduce and/or transform the existing social formation. These power relations influence what it is possible for individuals and groups to accomplish in particular social contexts. In explaining your educational influences in your own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations, my own advice is to seek out the most advanced social theories of the day and integrate insights from these into your explanations.

I continue to do this in my own research programme and I have included, with the reference to the work of the Russian psychologist Vasilyuk (1991), some of his ideas that I now bring into my own understandings about the explanatory power of energy and values.

Enhancing Rigour and Strengthening Validity

In the early days of gaining academic legitimacy for action research accounts, the issues of rigour and validity needed attention. In 1989 Richard Winter produced what I still consider to be the best text on rigour in action research. He recommended the use of the six principles of reflexive critique, dialectical critique, risk, plural structure, multiple resource and theory practice transformation. You can find more detail of these principles in Appendix 11 of the keynote address on Living Inclusional Values in Educational Standards of Practice and Judgement published in Ontario Action Researcher (Whitehead, 2006) and even more detail in the text at <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/cycle3.pdf>.

In relation to validity I continue to stress the importance of both personal and social validity drawing insights from the ideas of Michael Polanyi (1958) and Jurgen Habermas (1976). With Polanyi I stress the importance of an individual's responsibility for their own personal knowledge in the sense of having made a decision to understand the world from their own point of view as a personal claiming originality and exercising their judgment responsible with universal intent. With Habermas I emphasise the four criteria of social validity he

believes that we bring into our reaching an understanding with each other. I usually convene validation groups of some 4-8 people to help to strengthen the validity of living theory accounts. I ask the validity group to respond to an explanation of educational influence in learning with questions concerned with strengthening:

- i) the comprehensibility of the account
- ii) the evidential base that is used to justify any assertion
- iii) the explication of the normative social, cultural, historical and personal context from which the explanation of education influence emerged
- iv) the authenticity of the account in terms of living as fully as possible the values the individual uses to give meaning and purpose to their lives.

Educational Significance

The Presidential Addresses of both the British and American Educational Research Association usually highlight issues of national and global significance for educational researchers. For its 30th Anniversary BERA published the Presidential Addresses at:

http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/presidential_addresses.php

and you can also access these in the British Educational Research Journal that is available on-

line. The Presidential Addresses for AERA are published in Educational Researcher and

these are also available on-line. I think Catherine Snow's 2002 AERA Presidential call to

find ways of making public, personal experience of practice, will remain relevant for many

years to come. The Journals 'Action Research', 'Educational Action Research' and 'The

International Journal of Qualitative Methods' are also a source of ideas that can help to

highlight the educational significance of your own research. For example, I think that Holt's

(2003) call to develop appropriate evaluative criteria for autoethnographies will also remain

relevant for several years to come and can be used to highlight the significance of

representing, validating and legitimating the living standards of judgement in living

educational theories. The Farren and Whitehead (2006) paper

(<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/mfjwDIVERSEcomplete.pdf>)

on 'Educational Influences in Learning with Visual Narratives', may also be helpful in

describing the educational significance of your research from the primacy of a perception of

inclusionality.

References and Notes

Clandinin, J. (2007) Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping the Methodology, London, New York; Sage.

Cunningham, B. (1999) How do I come to know my spirituality as I create my own living educational theory. Ph.D. University of bath. Retrieved 28 May 2008 from

<http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/ben.shtml> . See the Appendix on *Action Research: How do I improve what I am doing?* for a justification of the choice of a living theory approach to

action research. Retrieved 28 May 2008 from

<http://people/bath.ac.uk/edsajw/benword/bapp.DOC>

Dadds, M. & Hart, S. (2001) *Doing Practitioner Research Differently*. London; RoutledgeFalmer.

Farren, M. & Whitehead, J. (2006) Educational Influences in Learning with Visual Narratives, in Childs, M, Cuttle, M, & Riley, K. (2006) *Developing Innovative Video Resources For Students Everywhere*. DIVERSE Proceedings: 2005 & 2006 5th International DIVERSE Conference 5th to 7th July 2005 Vanderbilt University Nashville , USA 6th International DIVERSE Conference 5th to 7th July 2006. Glasgow; Caledonian University Press, pp. 219-234. Retrieved 15 January 2007 from <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/mfjwDIVERSEcomplete.pdf>

Furlong, J. & Oancea, A. (2005) *Assessing Quality in Applied and Practice Based Educational Research*, Oxford; Oxford University, Department of Education. Retrieved 11 January 2006 from <http://209.85.129.104/search?q=cache:lz1CTUH-ukgJ:www.bera.ac.uk/pdfs/Qualitycriteria.pdf+furlong+and+oancea&hl=en&gl=uk&ct=clnk&cd=4&client=firefox-a>

Habermas, J. (1976) *Communication and the evolution of society*. London : Heinemann

In enhancing the validity of living theories I recommend the use of Habermas' (1976)

"I shall develop the thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated (or redeemed). Insofar as he wants to participate in a process of reaching understanding, he cannot avoid raising the following – and indeed precisely the following – validity claims. He claims to be:

- 1. Uttering something understandably;*
- 2. Giving (the hearer) something to understand;*
- 3. Making himself thereby understandable. And*
- 4. Coming to an understanding with another person.*

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true 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 so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right 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)

Habermas, J. (1987) *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume Two: The Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Oxford; Polity.

“..... I have attempted to free historical materialism from its philosophical ballast. Two abstractions are required for this: I) abstracting the development of the cognitive structures from the historical dynamic of events, and ii) abstracting the evolution of society from the historical concretion of forms of life. Both help in getting beyond the confusion of basic categories to which the philosophy of history owes its existence.

A theory developed in this way can no longer start by examining concrete ideals immanent in traditional forms of life. It must orient itself to the range of learning processes that is opened up at a given time by a historically attained level of learning. It must refrain from critically evaluating and normatively ordering totalities, forms of life and cultures, and life-contexts and epochs as a whole. And yet it can take up some of the intentions for which the interdisciplinary research program of earlier critical theory remains instructive.

Coming at the end of a complicated study of the main features of a theory of communicative action, this suggestion cannot count even as a “promissory note.” It is less a promise than a conjecture.” (Habermas, 1987, p. 383)

Habermas, J. (2002) *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, Oxford; Polity.

"The dispute between the two received paradigms - whether the autonomy of legal persons is better secured through individual liberties for private competition or through publicly guaranteed entitlements for clients of welfare bureaucracies - is superseded by a proceduralist concept of law. According to this conception, the democratic process must secure private and public autonomy at the same time: the individual rights that are meant to guarantee to women the autonomy to pursue their lives in the private sphere cannot even be adequately formulated unless the affected persons themselves first articulate and justify in public debate those aspects that are relevant to equal or unequal treatment in typical cases. The private autonomy of equally entitled citizens can only be secured only insofar as citizens activity exercise their civic autonomy." (p.264)

Holt, N. L. (2003) *Representation, Legitimation and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2 (1) 1-20.

McNiff, J. (2006) *My Story Is My Living Educational Theory*, in Clandinin, J. (2006) *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping the Methodology*. London, New York; Sage.

Noffke, S. (1997) *Professional, Personal, and Political Dimensions of Action Research* in, Apple, M. (Ed.) (1997) *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 22, Washington: AERA.

Ryle, G. (1973) *The Concept of Mind*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Said, E. W. (1997) *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. London ; Granta. I use the following points about originality and influence in highlighting the significance I give to explaining educational influences in learning:

“As a poet indebted to and friendly with Mallarme, Valery was compelled to assess originality and derivation in a way that said something about a relationship between two poets that could not be reduced to a simple formula. As the actual circumstances were rich, so too had to be the attitude. Here is an example from the “Letter About Mallarme”.

No word comes easier or oftener to the critic’s pen than the word influence, and no vaguer notion can be found among all the vague notions that compose the phantom armory of aesthetics. Yet there is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another.

It often happens that the work acquires a singular value in the other mind, leading to active consequences that are impossible to foresee and in many cases will never be possible to ascertain. What we do know is that this derived activity is essential to intellectual production of all types. Whether in science or in the arts, if we look for the source of an achievement we can observe that what a man does either repeats or refutes what someone else has done – repeats it in other tones, refines or amplifies or simplifies it, loads or overloads it with meaning; or else rebuts, overturns, destroys and denies it, but thereby assumes it and has invisibly used it. Opposites are born from opposites.

We say that an author is original when we cannot trace the hidden transformations that others underwent in his mind; we mean to say that the dependence on what he does on what others have done is excessively complex and irregular. There are works in the likeness of others, and works that are the reverse of others, but there are also works of which the relation with earlier productions is so intricate that we become confused and attribute them to the direct intervention of the gods. (Paul Valery, ‘Letter about Mallarme’, in Leonardo, Poe, Mallarme, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 241.

Valery converts ‘influence’ from a crude idea of the weight of one writer coming down in the work of another into a universal principle of what he calls ‘derived achievement’. He then connects this concept with a complex process of repetition that illustrates it by multiplying instances; this has the effect of providing a sort of wide intellectual space, a type of discursiveness in which to examine influence. Repetition, refinement, amplification, loading, overloading, rebuttal, overturning, destruction, denial, invisible use – such concepts completely modify a linear (vulgar) idea of ‘influence’ into an open field of possibility. Valery is careful to admit that chance and ignorance play important roles in this field; what we cannot see or find, as well as what we cannot predict, he says, produce excessive irregularity and complexity. Thus the limits of the field of investigation are set by examples whose nonconforming, overflowing energy begins to carry them out of the field. This is an extremely important refinement in Valery’s writing. For even as his writing holds in the wide system of variously dispersed relationships connecting writers with one another, he also shows how at its limits the field gives forth other relations that are hard to describe from within the field.” (Said, p.15)

Said, E. (1993) Culture and Imperialism, London; Vintage.

“As I use the word, ‘culture’ means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history.....

Second, and almost imperceptible, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. As Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s.... In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation of the state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent ‘returns’ to culture and tradition.” (Said, pp. xii-xiv, 1993)

Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Oxford; Oxford University Press.

“... what, we may ask, is the connection between "human capital" orientation and the emphasis on "human capability" with which this study has been much concerned? Both seem to place humanity at the center of attention, but do they have differences as well as some congruence? At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be said that the literature on human capital tends to concentrate on the agency of human beings in augmenting production possibilities. The perspective of human capability focuses, on the other hand, on the ability-the substantive freedom-of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have. The two perspectives cannot but be related, since both are concerned with the role of human beings, and in particular with the actual abilities that they achieve and acquire. But the yardstick of assessment concentrates on different achievements.”

Snow, C. E. (2001) *Knowing What We Know: Children, Teachers, Researchers*. Presidential Address to AERA, 2001, in Seattle, in *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 30, No.7, pp.3-9.

“The challenge is to enhance the value of personal knowledge and personal experience for practice. Good teachers possess a wealth of knowledge about teaching that cannot currently be drawn upon effectively in the preparation of novice teachers or in debates about practice. The challenge here is not to ignore or downplay this personal knowledge, but to elevate it. The knowledge resources of excellent teachers constitute a rich resource, but one that is largely untapped because we have no procedures for systematizing it. Systematizing would require procedures for accumulating such knowledge and making it public, for connecting it to bodies of knowledge established through other methods, and for vetting it for correctness and consistency. If we had agreed-upon procedures for transforming knowledge based on personal experiences of practice into ‘public’ knowledge, analogous to the way a researcher’s private knowledge is made public through peer-review and publication, the advantages would be great (my emphasis). For one, such knowledge might help us avoid drawing far-reaching conclusions about instructional practices from experimental studies carried out in rarified settings. Such systematized knowledge would certainly enrich the

research-based knowledge being increasingly introduced into teacher preparation programs. And having standards for the systematization of personal knowledge would provide a basis for rejecting personal anecdotes as a basis for either policy or practice.” (Snow, p.9)

Fyodor Vasilyuk (1991) *The Psychology of Experiencing: the Resolution of Life’s Critical Situations*. Hemel Hempstead; Harvester Wheatsheaf.

In the analysis of data in generating an evidence-based explanation for educational influence I have advocated the integration of insights from the most advanced social theories of the day. This often requires much reading to distill the meanings of a few phrases that can enhance and/or transform one’s research programme. For example, in my use of Vasilyuk’s idea of creative experiencing, I focus on the phrase:

Creative experiencing enables the individual to act on the basis of his or her value system, to actualise and affirm it, to act upon it under conditions which practically, materially operate against it.

However, bringing this insight into my own research programme has meant engaging with much of Vasilyuk’s text, including the following:

“The main problem and the main drive of the internally complex life is how to get rid of the painful necessity of constantly making choices, how to develop a psychological ‘organ’ to cope with complexity, one which will incorporate a yardstick for measuring the comparative significance of motives and be capable of integrating life relations firmly into a single whole of individual life. This ‘organ’ is value consciousness, for value is the only yardstick against which motives can be compared. The *value principle*, therefore, is the supreme principle of the complex-and-easy lived world.” (p.118)

“Although a value as a content of consciousness does not initially possess any energy, as the inner development of the personality proceeds the value can borrow energy from motives operative in reality, so that eventually the value develops from a content of consciousness into a content of life, and itself acquires the force of a real motive. A value is not any known content capable of becoming a motive, only a content such that it can lead, upon becoming a motive, to the growth and positive development of the personality. This transformation of a value from a primary motive into a real, perceptible motivational force is accompanied by an energy metamorphosis which is hard to explain. Having once become a real motive, a value suddenly proves to possess a mighty charge of energy, a potential, which cannot be accounted for by all the borrowings it may have made in the course of its evolution. One supposition that may be advanced to explain this is that when a value become truly part of life it is ‘switched in’ to the energies of the supra-individual entity to which that value links the individual.” (p.120)

“The outcome of experiencing a crisis can take two forms. One is restoration of the life disrupted by the crisis, its rebirth; the other is its transformation into a life essentially different. But in either case it is something life bringing one’s life to birth afresh, of building up a self, constructing a new self, i.e., creation, for what is creation but ‘bringing into existence’ or building up?”

In the first sub-type of creative experiencing, then, the result is restoration of life, but this does not mean life returning to its previous state. It means that what is preserved is only the most essential part of the life that was, its idea in terms of value, like a regiment shattered in battle living on in the stand saved from the field.

The experiencing of events, even of those which have struck very heavy and irreversible blows at the whole 'body' of life, so long as they have not injured life's central, ideal values can develop along one of the two following lines. The first involves the internal conquest of existing psychology identifications between the life intent and the particular forms of realising it which have now become impossible. In this process the life intent becomes as it were 'less bodily', takes on a more generalised and at the same time more essential form, more closely approach an ideal life value. The second line of progress in experiencing, in some ways opposite to the foregoing, lies in seeking out, among the life possibilities still open, other potential embodiments of the life intent; the search is to some degree made easier by the life intent itself becoming more generalised. If the search produces forms for realisation of intent which receive positive sanction from the still-operative idea of value, a new life intent is formed. Thereafter there is a gradual coming-together of the intent with appropriate sensory-practical forms, or it might be better to say that the intent 'takes root' and starts to grow in the material soil of life.

All such experiencing, where the thrust is towards producing a new life intent, still does not destroy the old life intent (now impossible). Here the new does not oust the old but continues its work; the old content of life is preserved by the power of creative experiencing, and not as a dead, inert *something past* but as the living *history* of the personality, still continuing in the new content.....

The second sub-type of creative experiencing occurs when the life intent proves to have been founded on false values, and is discredited along with those values, by what their actual realisation has produced. Here the task of creative experiencing is, first, to discover a new value system, able to provide a foundation for a new, meaningful life intent (in this part of it, creative experiencing coincides with value experiencing); second, to absorb the new system and apply it to the individual self in such a way that it can impart meaning to the past life-history and form an ideal notion of the self within the system; and third, to eradicate, in real practice in the sphere of the senses, all traces of the spiritual organism's infection by the now fading false values (and their corresponding motives, attitudes, wishes, etc.), at the same time affirming, again in terms of real practice and sensory embodiment, the ideal to which the self has won through.

The third sub-type of creative experiencing is connected with the highest stages of personality development in terms of value. A life crisis is precipitated by the destruction, or threatened destruction, of the value entity to which the individual seems himself as belonging. The person sees this whole under attack and being destroyed by the forces of a hostile reality. Since we are here speaking of a person who is a fully competent inhabitant of the complex-and-difficult lived world, it is clear that he does not simply see this destruction but cannot fail to see it, being incapable of hedonistically ignoring reality. But on the other hand, it is equally impossible for such a person to relinquish the value entity in question, to

betray it, to abandon one's convictions. A rational assessment of the situation would admit it to be fundamentally insoluble.

So what is the 'strategy' of creative experiencing? Like value experiencing, it first of all brings up the question of whether reality is to be trusted – should reason be allowed to stand as the source of the sole, genuine truth about reality, should the given factual reality of the moment be accepted as the fully valid expression of reality as a whole? For value experiencing it was a sufficient accomplishment of its task – to enable the individual to stand by his value system – to disallow the claims of reason and to recognise in ideal terms that value reality was the higher reality. From creative experiencing something more is required, for its task is to enable the individual *to act* on the basis of his value system, to actualise and affirm it, to act upon it under conditions which practically, materially operate against it." (p. 140-142)

I make this point to emphasise the importance of showing in your research proposal that you are aware of texts that contain the most advanced social theories of the day, and that you will be engaging with in the course of your research programme. The economic theory of human capability in the work of Amartya Sen, with the reference above, would count as one such theory.

Whitehead, J. (2006) Living Inclusional Values in Educational Standards of Practice and Judgement. Vol. 8.2.1. Retrieved on 28 May 2008 from http://www.nipissingu.ca/oar/new_issue-V821E.htm

Whitehead, J. & McNiff, J. (2006) Action Research Living Theory, London; Sage.

Whitty, G. (2005) Education(al) research and education policy making: is conflict inevitable? Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association, University of Glamorgan, 17 September 2005. Here is how Whitty highlights the importance of the distinction.

One way of handling the distinction might be to use the terms 'education research' and 'educational research' more carefully. In this paper, I have so far used the broad term education research to characterise the whole field, but it may be that within that field we should reserve the term educational research for work that is consciously geared towards improving policy and practice..... One problem with this distinction between 'education research' as the broad term and 'educational research' as the narrower field of work specifically geared to the improvement of policy and practice is that it would mean that BERA, as the British Educational Research Association would have to change its name or be seen as only involved with the latter. So trying to make the distinction clearer would also involve BERA in a re-branding exercise which may not necessarily be the best way of spending our time and resources. But it is at least worth considering.

