

## **Improving evidence-based coaching psychology with action research, living educational theories and multi-media narratives**

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Notes for a workshop presentation at the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology, 3.45-5.15 on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012 at the Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston University, UK with the theme Putting coaching psychology into practice: an evidence based approach.

(The summary of the workshop and details of the presenter can be accessed at [http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/documents/jack\\_whitehead\\_web\\_1.pdf](http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/documents/jack_whitehead_web_1.pdf) )

This workshop will focus on improving evidence-based coaching psychology by using action research, living theories and multi-media narratives.

### **Creating an Evidence-based Coaching Psychology**

The first keynote of the day by Dr. Tatiana Bachkirova was on the nature of evidence, quality of research and self-deception in coaching and coaching psychology. The final keynote immediately following this workshop is by Professor Rob Briner on evidence-based coaching psychology, what would it look like and how close are we? In this workshop I shall focus on the creation of an evidence-based coaching psychology that draws data from my coaching practice in supervising over 30 successfully completed doctoral research programmes between 1996-2012. You can access these at <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> . I shall also pay attention to the nature of evidence, the quality of research and the use of visual data in revealing and overcoming self-deception in coaching and coaching psychology.

The main assumption is this workshop is that as members of the Special Group in Coaching Psychology of the British Psychological Society you have the capacity to create your own evidence-based coaching psychologies in the form of explanations of your coaching influence in your own learning and in the learning of those you are coaching. One approach to putting psychology into practice takes a psychology that exists in abstract generalizations of propositional theories that can be 'applied to practice'. For example in my initial teacher education programme I was encouraged to learn Piaget's Cognitive Stage Theory and apply this in my teaching practice. I found this useful at the beginning of my teaching career as I recognized that the language I was using in teaching science to my 11 – 18 year pupils required that all my pupils could use the language of formal operations, whilst most of my 11 year pupils required a more concrete approach in my communications. Whilst this approach to putting psychology into practice has its uses I am suggesting a different approach to putting coaching psychology into practice. I am suggesting that 'putting an evidence-based coaching psychology into practice' could be done by created in the explanations for learning produced by coaching psychologists in

enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in supporting the learning of those I am coaching?'

I hope that this approach to 'putting psychology into practice' will support Dr. Dave Putwain's intentions as the 2012-13 Chair of the British Psychological Society's Education Section:

"I really want to use my year in office to encourage further collaboration between academics, teachers and educational psychologists. For example a lot of teachers don't realise the importance of research, which is something I'd like to address. Also, I think some academics lose touch at grassroots level so I'd like to ensure that this doesn't happen. Ideally, I'd like to build stronger relationships between the different groups as I believe there are real benefits from talking to each other and understanding each other's needs." (Putwain, 2012)

Here is how I think this could be done using action research, living theories and multi-media narratives.

### **Using Action Research**

One of the assumptions in this workshop that is open to question is my belief that everyone in the room already uses action-reflection cycles in exploring questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

What I mean by this is that you are already using action-reflection cycles to improve practice which include:

- i) a focus on values in expressions of concern about what one wishes to improve;
- ii) the creation of action plans; acting and gathering data to make a judgment about the effectiveness of the actions;
- iii) evaluating the effectiveness of the actions;
- iv) modifying concerns, action plans and actions in the light of the evaluations.

Whilst these action-reflection cycles may be intuitive rather than explicit in your own practice, what makes the action research, research, is the production of a validated explanation of the coaching psychologist's educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work. Before we spend a few minutes in conversations about the ways in which you enquire into your own practice I just want to check if anyone has already make public, possibly on the internet, such a validated and evidence-based explanation of your influence?

I am thinking of evidence such as that in the validated and academically legitimated explanations of completed, living theory doctoral research programmes into questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' These explanations include a recently completed enquiry by a senior educational psychologist (Huxtable, 2012) working in a

local authority. The explanations are freely available on the web from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> and I'll quickly browse down the titles of over 30 of the successfully completed doctorates I've supervised between 1996-2012 each of which contains evidence of the influence of my coaching practice in the creation of the individual's living educational theory.

### **Creating Living Theories**

I call these validated explanations living-theories. The idea of living-theories came from my interest in Ilyenkov's question in his work on Dialectical Logic, 'If an object exists as a living contradiction what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it?' Those of you interested in the logics of explanations might know the 2,500 year arguments between dialecticians and formal logicians in which each side denies the rationality of the other (Popper, 1963, p. 316; Marcuse, 1964, p. 104). In my first use of video in a self-study of my classroom practice in 1972 I experienced myself as a living contradiction. My 'I' in my question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' held together the contradictory statements, I value enquiry learning and I am negated enquiry learning. What I mean by this is that I believed that I had established enquiry learning with my students in my science lessons in the sense that I was eliciting and responding to their questions. However, I could see on the video that I was actually giving my pupils the questions and not eliciting or responding to their questions. As soon as I experienced this living contradiction my imagination began working to create possibilities for improving my practice in the direction of living my values more fully. The visual data helped me to face the issue of self-deception raised by Dr. Tatiana Bachkirova in her keynote, in the recognition of my experience of myself as a living contradiction in holding values whilst denying them in practice.

In emphasizing the importance of values in sustaining motivation for improving practice I shall now focus on the values you use as a coach to give meaning and purpose to your life in your professional practice. In a conversation in pairs I am asking you to talk with a partner for some 10 minutes about what you want to improve about your own practice and about what you want to see improve in the practice of someone you are coaching. As you talk I want you to reflect in action about the values that are motivating you in your practice. I'll let you know after 5 minutes so that you can work at giving each other a similar amount of time to contribute to the conversation.

In this part of the workshop I want to focus on the importance of what I call the embodied expression of values as explanatory principles in explanations of influences in learning. I want to distinguish our embodied expression of values, which flow with energy, from the expression of the meanings of values through words alone. In my early training in British Analytic Philosophy I was encouraged to clarify meanings through explicating meanings in relationships between words. For example the meaning of punishment could be defined as the intentional infliction of pain by someone in authority on someone who had broken a rule. In contrast to this approach to defining meaning I am suggesting that an evidence-based coaching psychology could be created from the embodied expression of meanings in coaching practice. In the here and now of this event, I am living my own

coaching practice in working to support you, if you wish, in generating your own living theory. I know that I am expressing the energy flow values I use to explain my influence in my coaching practice. These include a life-affirming energy I bring into my coaching in supporting the creation of living educational theories that are enhancing the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity.

Earlier I browsed through the titles of over 30 completed doctoral theses to show you the range of professional contexts and enquiries. I now want to return to the living theory doctorates to focus on some of the Abstracts. Each Abstract has emerged from a minimum of 5 years of enquiry. They summarise the originality of the contribution to knowledge in the explanatory principles used in the explanation of influence. Each one offers an original standard of judgment for legitimating the originality of the contribution to knowledge. I am grateful for Moira Laidlaw's (1996) insight that the standards of judgment are themselves 'living'. Each thesis acknowledges the influence of my own supervision/coaching practice in helping to clarify and evolve the meanings of the energy-flowing values used as explanatory principles. In 2003 I was a member of a working party of the Senate of the University of Bath that made a recommendation that the regulations governing the submission of research degrees should be amended to explicitly allow the submission of digital media. In 2004 the regulations were changed to permit this submission and Mary Hartog (2004), a national teaching fellow, was the first to submit a living theory thesis with a multi-media narrative. Since 2004 the majority of the living theory completions have such a narrative with digital technology.

### **Using Multi-Media Narratives**

I now want to focus on the inclusion of visual data with digital technology in explanations of influences in learning. Whilst I have been using visual data from video since 1972 it was only in October 2012 that the Journal Teaching and Teacher Education (TATE) issued a call for papers for a special issue on 'Scholarly Inquiry Beyond Written Text'. The call for papers recognized that visual data could be communicating meanings that could not be communicated through text alone.

Whilst many psychologists understand the importance of expressions of energy-flowing values in sustaining motivation in improving practice Vasilyuk's (1991) point about the energy paradigm continues to have meaning for me:

Conceptions involving energy are very current in psychology, but they have been very poorly worked out from the methodological standpoint. It is not clear to what extent these (p. 63) conceptions are merely models of our understanding and to what extent they can be given ontological status. Equally problematic are the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although it is obvious that in fact there are certain links: 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. (pp. 63-64)

The ease of integrating visual and audio data in analyzing and explaining the influences of coaching practice will be I'm sure known to you all. My preference of using Apple Mac with the i-movie application and Quicktime is because of the ease of transferring raw data from an HD camera into the computer and then compressing the large files into .mov files for use in quicktime. Here is how I used the facility in Quicktime for moving the cursor smoothly along a clip, to clarifying and communicating meanings of embodied expressions of energy flowing values of love and compassion in explanations of influences in learning, using what I call 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). I am using *empathetic resonance* to communicate a recognition of the immediate presence of the other in communicating the living values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life.

In my use of visual data, with digital technology I want to emphasise that I do not believe that the visual data can usually 'speak for itself' in terms of the meanings being communicated, without the context and meanings that are integrated with the visual data in a visual narrative.

In this concluding part of the workshop I want to focus on the importance of sharing meanings from visual data in visual narratives that can be submitted to a validation group to strengthen the validity of the evidence-based explanations within the narratives.

*The use of visual narrative and empathetic resonance in clarifying and communicating energy-flowing values as explanatory principles*

Visual narratives in living theories are the stories told by practitioner-researchers that include their descriptions and explanations of their educational influences in learning. If you are given a video-clip without context, it is likely the interpretations will differ widely. A visual narrative that includes the video-data as evidence in relation to a knowledge-claim, allows you to judge the validity of the researcher's assertions.

Whilst experiences of harmony and expressions of pleasure have emerged in my educational journey, the journey includes some difficult and painful experiences. Here is how I have communicated something of the nature of the difficulties in a previous publication that includes the first video-clip:

*"I have documented most of the difficulties experienced over the 30 years between 1976-2006 in previous publications (Whitehead, 1993, 2004). They include a 1976 judgment by the University that I had exhibited forms of behaviour which had harmed the good order and morale of the School of Education. They include the 1980 and 1982 judgments that I could not question the judgments of examiners of my two doctoral*

*submissions under any circumstances. They include the 1987 judgment that my activities and writings were a challenge to the present and proper order of the university and not consistent with the duties the University wished me to pursue.*

*In 1990, based on this judgment about my activities and writings, as evidence of a prima facie breach of my academic freedom, Senate established a working party on a matter of academic freedom. They reported in 1991: 'The working party did not find that... his academic freedom had actually been breached. This was however, because of Mr Whitehead's persistence in the face of pressure; a less determined individual might well have been discouraged and therefore constrained.'*

*Here is my re-enactment of a meeting with the working party where I had been invited to respond to a draft report in which the conclusion was that my academic freedom had not been breached; a conclusion I agreed with. What I did not agree with was that there was no recognition of the pressure to which I had been subjected to while sustaining my academic freedom.*

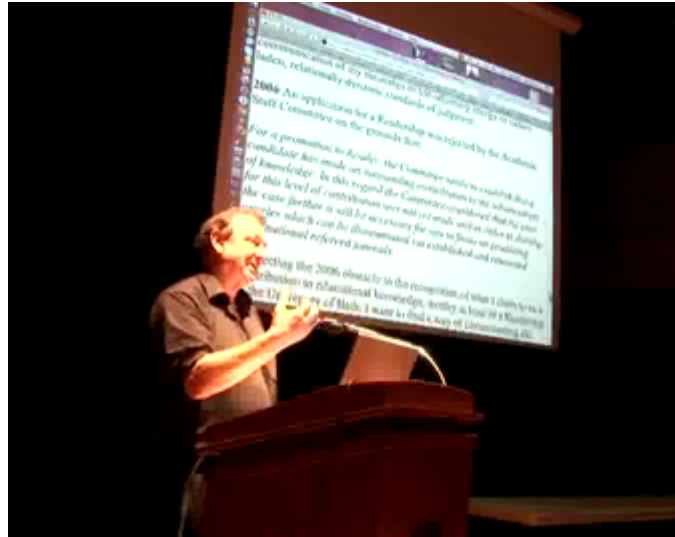


**Video 1 56 second clip of [Responding to matters of power and academic freedom](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBTLfyjkFh0)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBTLfyjkFh0>

*In the clip I think you may feel a disturbing shock in the recognition of the power of my anger in the expression of energy and my passion for academic freedom and academic responsibility. Following my meeting with the working party the report that went to Senate acknowledged that the reason my academic freedom had not been breached was because of my persistence in the face of pressure. This phrase, 'persistence in the face of pressure' is a phrase I continue to use in comprehending my meaning of Walton's standard of judgment of spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy (Walton, 2008)." (Whitehead, 2008)*

The second, 7: 21 minute clip below is taken from the end of a keynote address I gave to the International Conference of Teacher Research in 2008 in New York. I can see myself explicitly rechanneling the anger expressed in the first clip, into a loving, creative and humorous response that I believe will resonate with you as an invitation to enquire with me in a creative space.



<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=KXLqGAAK-D0>

As I move the cursor along several times to the end, and back to the beginning, and back to the end again, I find myself pausing at 6mins 44 seconds. As I move towards and past this point, I feel and see myself expressing what I mean by a flow of life-affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity. I listen to what I am saying and I hear myself articulating my meanings of the significance of this flow of energy with values for my productive life in education and as explanatory principles in explanations of my educational influences in learning. I feel myself being receptively responsive to my audience in offering the gift of my explanation in the hope that they will accept it in the spirit in which it is intended and find something of use-value for themselves and their own work in education.

In the 6 minutes 44 seconds before this image I feel and see myself rechanneling expressions of anger from the past experiences shown in the first video-clip into a flow of dynamic loving energy (Walton, 2008) in what I am doing. In this clip I feel myself expressing this loving energy as an explanatory principle for what I am doing in education. I also see myself articulating these understandings in a way I believe communicated with my audience at the time. I hope that this is communicated to you in the here and now.

In constructing a visual narrative with an explanation of educational influence that is intended to communicate with a reader I am aware of two phases of writing. In the first phase I produce a writerly text in which I am clarifying for myself the explanatory principles I used to explain my influence. These meanings usually emerge in the course of the writing and are clear at the end of the writing. I then produce a readerly text which



usually involves bringing what has been clarified at the end of the writerly text into a 'framing' for the reader at the beginning of the readerly text together with a description of how the writings are organised to justify the knowledge-claims in the writings.

I am claiming that the visual data in a visual narrative can enhance the validity of the inclusional understandings of the explanatory principles that can explain educational influences in learning. It can not only enhance the validity of the inclusional understandings. It can transcend the arguments about contradiction in the 2,500 argument between dialectical and formal logicians. Dialecticians claim that contradiction is at the nucleus of explanations of change (Marcuse, 1964, p. 104). Formal logicians claim that contradictions must be removed from theories because theories that contain contradictions are useless (Popper, 1963, p. 316). This inclusional logic is a living logic in the sense that the explanations are distinguished by energy-flowing values that can integrate insights from both dialectical thinking. This logic can accept that the 'I' in the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' exists as a living contradiction. It can also accept insights from formal or propositional theories, in understanding the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in the ecological complexity of our practice and our writings.

In developing a psychology grounded in visual narratives with empathetic resonance I believe that the issue of the validity of the explanations generated by such a psychology helps to establish the rigour of the scholarship and the research.

I advocate the use of questions I derived from Habermas' (1976, pp2-3) four criteria for social validity in reaching a shared understanding, by validation groups of usually between 3-8 peers.

- i) How can the comprehensibility of the explanation be improved?
- ii) How can the evidence provided to justify assertions be strengthened?
- iii) How can the awareness of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in the explanation be extended and deepened?
- iv) How can the authenticity of the explanation in the sense of the researching showing a commitment to living their espoused values as fully as possible be demonstrated more fully over time and interaction?

I do hope that will access from <http://www.actionresearch.net> in the Jack Whitehead's Writings and the What's New section the web the multi-media presentations at the American and British Educational Research Association Conference, together with an extended dialogue in Research Intelligence below as these support the ideas in this workshop.

Adler-Collins, J.P. (2008) Creating New Forms Of Living Educational Theories Through Collaborative Educational Research From Eastern And Western Contexts: A response to Jack Whitehead. *Research Intelligence* 104, 17-18. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bera/16-18RI104.pdf>



Bruce-Ferguson, P. (2008) Increasing Inclusion in Educational Research: Reflections from New Zealand. *Research Intelligence*, 102, 24-25. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bera/24-25RI102.pdf>

Hartog, M. (2004) A Self Study Of A Higher Education Tutor: How Can I Improve My Practice? Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 30 November 2012 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/hartog.shtml>

Huxtable, M. (2009) How do we contribute to an educational knowledge base? A response to Whitehead and a challenge to BERJ. *Research Intelligence*, 107, 25-26. Retrieved 11 January 2010 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/huxtable/mh2009beraRI107.pdf>

Laidlaw, M. (2008) Increasing Inclusion in Educational Research: A Response to Pip Bruce-Ferguson and Jack Whitehead. *Research Intelligence*, 104, 16-17. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bera/moira16-18RI104.pdf>

Masters, K. (2012) Increasing Inclusion in Educational Research. A Continuing debate: Valuing the 'Cosmoscape.' *Research Intelligence*, 117, 22-23. Retrieved 7 May 2012 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/kenmasters/kenmastersRIApril2012opt.pdf>

Rayner, A. (2010) The Inclusional Nature of Living Educational Theory: A Receptive Response to Whitehead. *Research Intelligence* 109: 26-27. Retrieved 17<sup>th</sup> February 2010 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/alanraynerRI10926-27opt.pdf>.

Whitehead, J. (2008) Increasing Inclusion In Educational Research: A Response To Pip Bruce Ferguson. *Research Intelligence*, 103, 16-17. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bera/16-17RI103.pdf>

Whitehead, J. (2008) An Epistemological Transformation in what counts as Educational Knowledge: Responses to Laidlaw and Adler-Collins. *Research Intelligence*, 105, 28-29. Retrieved 11 January 2008 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jw2829RI105.pdf>

Whitehead, J. (2010) The Role of Educational Theory In Generating An Epistemological Transformation In What Counts As Educational Knowledge With Educational Responsibility: Responses To Huxtable and Rayner, and Biesta, Allan and Edwards. *Research Intelligence*, 110, 25-26. Retrieved 8 May 2010 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwri110p2526opt.pdf>

(These are also accessible from the homepage of the British Educational Research Association at <http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/publications/ri/>)

### **About the presenter**

Jack Whitehead is an Adjunct Professor at Liverpool Hope University in the UK. He is a former President of the British Educational Research Association and Distinguished

Scholar in Residence at Westminster College, Utah. He is a Visiting Professor at Ningxia University in China and a Visiting Fellow at the University of Bath. He is a member of the editorial board of the Educational Journal of Living Theories. Between 1973 -2009 his research programme in the Department of Education at the University of Bath focused on the creation of the living educational theories that individual's use to explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work.

His original contributions to educational knowledge have focused on enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' These contributions can be accessed from his web-site at <http://www.actionresearch.net>. His recent research has focused on the use of video-data in explanations of educational influences in learning in a range of workplaces with a focus on the continuing professional development of teachers. In the multi-media Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) he explains how video-data can be used to communicate the life-affirming energy and values of humanity that teachers are expressing in their educational relationships and in their explanations of their educational influences (<http://ejolts.net/node/80> ).

His video and keynote to the Association for Coaching Conference on the 22 June 2012 can be accessed at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwcoachlectureedinburgh010612.pdf>

The multi-media presentation To Know Is Not Enough, Or Is It? to AERA 2012 in Vancouver in the Symposium, "To Know is Not Enough": Action Research as the Core of Educational Research on the 14th April, 2012 can be accessed at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwaera12noffke200212.pdf>

You can see the living theory approach developed by Jack Whitehead for enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' at his web-site <http://www.actionresearch.net>. For an introduction to his approach see:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arplanner.htm>

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