

Jack Whitehead's meaning of educational community as an explanatory principle in his explanation of his educational influences in learning.

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Introduction

I first put forward the idea of a living theory of education (Whitehead, 1985) and developed the idea in a living-educational-theory (Whitehead 1989) as an individual's explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding. Between 1996-2012 I supervised some 32 successfully completed Living Theory doctorates at the University of Bath and have posted over 40 of such doctorates from different Universities around the world at <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> . Whilst continuing to supervise such doctoral research programmes at the University of Cumbria, my own research has focused on generating, within educational communities, explanations of my influence in enhancing the influence of Living Theory research as a global social movement.

Grounding my research within educational communities has influenced the nature of the educational epistemology I use to justify my claims to educational knowledge. I am thinking in particular of the meanings of the explanatory principles I use to explain my educational influences. When I began my enquiry in 1967, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice in education?' my epistemology was positivist in the sense that I used a controlled experimental design with the random allocation of 81 pupils to three groups to see if I could answer this question in my Masters dissertation in the psychology of education on 'A preliminary investigation of the processes through which adolescents acquire scientific understanding'. I used Piaget's cognitive stage theory and Bloom's taxonomy to give construct and content validity to the items I used in my test for scientific understanding.

My dissatisfaction with this epistemology and methodology was that I began to see that I was testing the validity of Piaget's and Bloom's ideas rather than answering my own question. I began to appreciate that my positivist epistemology and methodology with its removal of 'I' from the question were not appropriate for my enquiry, 'How do I improve my practice?'

With the help of video of my classroom practice I could see that I existed as a living contradiction in that I believed that I had established enquiry learning in the classroom, whilst the video showed that I was giving my pupils the questions to answer rather than eliciting the questions from my pupils. I moved my educational epistemology and methodology onto a dialectical base, following the question asked by Soviet logician Ilyenkov (1977), 'If an object exists as a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it?' My doctoral thesis (Whitehead, 1999) clarified my dialectical approach to educational enquiry and living-educational-theory with its nucleus of contradiction.

In the early 2000s, with the influence of Alan Rayner's idea of natural inclusion I came to a different epistemological understanding grounded in a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflexive and co-creative.

Here is how I am now clarifying my meaning of an educational community in an explanation of my contribution to Living Theory research as a global social movement, starting from within conversations of Friday morning's Breakfast Café Conversations. I shall start my clarification by using the following sculptures, provided by Andy Henon, as metaphors for my understanding of an educational community.



Here is an extract from Andy Henon's description of the bowl:

'Celebratory bowl, supporting hands and offerings'

"Twenty years of caring means a lot to many people young and old. Giving hope, support, security like a family giving us the freedom to be ourselves"

This year (2016) the Carers' Centre is celebrating 20 years of working with carers in Bath & North East Somerset. Over that time the centre has helped thousands of carers get the support they need to manage their caring role.

You can access the full notes at

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/henon/henonbowl.pdf>

Here are two further images of art works that Andy has sent through with the following comment that is helping me to clarify my meaning of an educational community:





However as a more meaningful metaphor do you not think that the community pot or Kelly's painting is not a more fitting one? These pieces hold examples of the unique, individual and specific coming together with the common and the shared. The piece literally embodies the community making through action, through doing the 'Hope' beyond the despair of the intellect? Here I

think is the metaphor unless you mean that the bowl embodies absence through presence that the bowl symbolises that there are others in the social movement or educational community beyond present on the day?

I can say that I do consider myself part of the 'Living Theory' educational community and this document stands as my reaffirmation of a presence through absence.

I now want to continue to clarify my meaning of an educational community from within conversations of the weekly Breakfast Café Conversations in the Carers' Centre in Bath. Apart from Andy none of these participants were involved in the creation of the bowl or pot, but as Andy says I am using these as metaphors for contributions from *the unique, individual and specific coming together with the common and shared* in the Breakfast Café Conversations.

In the living-poster of the Breakfast Café Conversation community of June 2018, on the next page you can see images of the participants. Underneath the majority of images you can access the living-posters of individuals by clicking on the live urls below each image. To access the living-posters of individuals you must do this by clicking on and then clicking on the urls below each image (the urls on the image on the next page are not live):

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/concafe250518.pdf>

The living/dynamic nature of my understanding of educational community can be understood through the changes in the living-posters through time. For example if you access my living-poster at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/jack020617.pdf>

You will see the different educational communities I see myself contributing to as I research my influence in Living Theory research as a social movement. You can also access a previous living-poster from 2015.

I hope that I have clarified my meaning of an educational community in the sense that I see myself as existing within a community of relationships within which each individual is making their own unique, individual and specific contributions within the common and shared values that constitute their shared, good conversations. I am hoping that Elly Bernard, Julie Wevill and William House will provide their new or updated living-posters to help clarify what we mean by 'good conversations'.

The living-posters of participants in the Breakfast Café Conversations up to June 2018

[Living-posters homepage](#)



Jack Whitehead
Academic & practitioner
educational research



Marie Hustable
Passion-led learning



Andrew Hanson
Socially engaged art



Shelagh Helmes
Scarred identities,
marginalised communities



Robyn Pound
Alongside-ness, health
visiting provision



William House
Community action,
holistic medicine



Chris Jones
Empowering leadership,
inclusion



Nigel Harrison
Authentic leadership, school
practice

CONVERSATION CAFE



The Conversation Cafe research support group has been meeting early in the morning weekly for many years at venues in and around Bath, UK. Members have joined, left and returned as their personal and work circumstances have changed. Whoever has been part of these conversations have helped to create a consistently vibrant, convivial, and energising space for sharing and supporting our individual and collective efforts to contribute to the flourishing of humanity by researching our practice to improve it and offer valid accounts of our explanations of our educational influence in our own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations we are part of (our living-educational-theories)



Lynn Spurrell
Coaching, change
management



Sonia Hutchings
Sustainable leadership



Kate Kemp
Listening, loving,
laughing, living



Rachel Burgess wellbeing
into elderhood



Joao Rice
Children with sensory
impairment



Deborah Jane Love
justice, lifelong
learning



Surrinder Sandham-Bains
Care, health, visiting,
CPD

Members of the Conversation Cafe research group, some of whom you can see above, share a common passion to contribute to the flourishing of humanity through researching our practice to improve it, making public valid accounts of our living-theories and spreading knowledge of the transformational and life-affirming and life-enhancing possibilities Living Theory research offers.