

Making original contributions to knowledge through Living Theory research Summary

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The purpose of this summary is to help Living Theory doctoral researchers clarify and justify their original contributions to educational knowledge whilst fulfilling the other standards of judgement for a PhD degree from the University of Cumbria (Appendix). A more detailed paper is available at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwstandardsuofc011117.pdf>

What distinguishes a claim to knowledge in terms of epistemology is its unit of appraisal (what is being judged), the standards of judgement (how the judgments are being made) and the logic (the mode of thought that distinguishes the claim as rational). Therefore when your thesis is assessed it is important to be clear about the nature of your original contribution to knowledge. Do bear in mind that your contribution should include: a systematic acquisition of, and insight into, a substantial body of knowledge including the primary literature in your particular area of interest and an ability to relate theory and concepts to evidence in a systematic way and to draw appropriate conclusions based on the evidence (Appendix)

In Living Theory research **the unit of appraisal** is an individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning. These could be influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. Because your explanation must include insights from the primary literature in your area of study your explanation must make a contribution to knowledge beyond an 'egotistical' perspective. Therefore, when your thesis is assessed it is very important that you clearly communicate that the unit of appraisal is your explanation of your educational influences in learning and that this explanation is making an original contribution to educational knowledge and a contribution to educational research methodology.

The living standards of judgment include the energy-flowing ontological and relational/social values that are used by an individual to give meaning and purpose to their lives and which are used as explanatory principles. The distinction between the unit of appraisal and the standards of judgment is that the unit is the individual's explanation of their educational influence in learning. The standards are the values that are used as explanatory principles and to evaluate the validity of the explanation as an original contribution to knowledge. The standards are living (Laidlaw, 1996) in the sense that they are evolving in the course of their clarification and communication. The embodied expressions of the meanings of these ontological values are clarified in the course of their emergence in practice. Digital visual data is often used, with a process of empathetic resonance, for clarifying and communicating the meanings of these energy-flowing values that are used in the generation of evidence-based explanations.

Logic is the mode of thought appropriate for comprehending the real as rational. (Marcuse, 1964, p. 105). Hence its importance in judging the rationality of an original contribution to knowledge. You can appreciate something about the 2,500 year disagreements between formal and dialectical logicians, in which they challenge the rationality of each other's logics, from the disagreements between Popper and Marcuse in the middle of the 20th Century (Popper, 1963, pp. 316-7; Marcuse, 1964, p. 111). Because it is the logic of your explanation that will determine its comprehensibility it is important that you clarify for your reader the logical form your thesis takes to communicate the rationality of your explanation.

There are distinctions between Living Theory and other forms of research that you may find useful. In the detailed paper I distinguish Living Theory research from Action Research; Narrative Research; Phenomenological Research; Grounded Theory Research; Ethnographic Research; Case Study Research and Autoethnographical Research.

For example, one way of distinguishing Action Research is through the use of action-reflection cycles in which researchers identify their values-based concerns; what they are going to do following an action plan; what data they are going to collect to make a judgment on the influences of the actions; evaluating the influences; redefining concerns and actions in the light of the evaluations. Living Theory research can include Action Research but is distinguished through the creation of a living-educational-theory as an explanation of educational influence in learning. Action researchers are not required to create a living-educational-theory. Such a creation is a necessary condition of being a Living Theory researcher.

References

Laidlaw, M. (1996) How can I create my own living educational theory as I offer you an account of my educational development? Ph.D., University of Bath. Retrieved 11 October 2017 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/moira2.shtml>

Marcuse, H. (1964) One Dimensional Man, London; Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Popper, K. (1963) Conjectures and Refutations, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX

From pages 23-24 of the Research Students Handbook from the University of Cumbria (Retrieved 31 October 2017 from

<https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/media/university-of-cumbria-website/content-assets/public/graduateschool/documents/GraduateSchoolHandbook.pdf>)

A successful candidate for the degree of PhD should be able to demonstrate (taken from Lancaster University Manual of Academic Regulations & Procedures):

a)- an ability to conceptualise, design and implement a major project for the generation of significant new knowledge, applications and/or understanding, using appropriate concepts and methods, where necessary adapting these to meet unforeseen issues;

- b)- a systematic acquisition of, and insight into, a substantial body of knowledge including the primary literature in their particular area of interest;
- c)- an ability to relate theory and concepts to evidence in a systematic way and to draw appropriate conclusions based on the evidence;
- d)- critical investigation of their research topic resulting in the creation and interpretation of knowledge which extends the forefront of their discipline through original research;
- e)- a detailed understanding of, and ability to use, applicable techniques for research and advanced inquiry in their field;
- f)- that they can make informed judgements on complex issues in their field, often in the absence of complete data;
- g)- that the research is of publishable quality and is of a standard which satisfies peer review;
- h)- that they are competent as an independent researcher in their discipline and capable of continuing to undertake research at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches;
- i)- an understanding of the place of the research in the wider context;
- j)- an ability to recognise the limitations of the research undertaken and to be able to suggest ways of overcoming these in future research;
- k)- an ability to write clearly and effectively and to meet approved criteria for formal presentation of a written thesis;
- l)- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring personal responsibility and autonomous initiative in complex and often unpredictable situations;
- m)- the ability to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK states that Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated (2014, pg.30):

- a) the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- b) a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
- c) the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- d) a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- a) make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- b) continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.

And holders will have:

- a) the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.