Embracing the 'messiness' of action research in enhancing your educational influences in learning with the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI).

Notes for a presentation by Jack Whitehead to a meeting of NEARI in Dublin on the 16th January 2016.

ABSTRACT

This presentation is focused on the importance of making public and sharing your embodied knowledge as educators in improving learning and professionalism in the Republic of Ireland's schools, colleges and universities. It includes a focus on your unique creativity and the constellation of values you use in asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?'

I shall show where the ideas have evolved since my presentations in Dublin on *Research-based professionalism through living educational theories* to Annual Conference of Educational Studies Association of Ireland http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/ESAI.pdf (Whitehead, 1998) and *Creativity: Enhancing our Vision of the Future with Multimedia Representations of Learning* a keynote to the 2011 DIVERSE conference https://vimeo.com/35292978 (Whitehead, 2011).

I shall also emphasize the importance of embracing the 'messiness' of action research in the creative phases of generating your living-educational-theory and offer evidence to show the potential educational influences in the process of making public your embodied knowledge as a professional educator. This includes your explanations of your educational influences in your own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence your practice and understandings.

The importance of communities, such as NEARI, will be shown in sustaining motivations and in enhancing the validity of contributions to educational knowledge. I shall demonstrate the use of multi-screen SKYPE conversations and the use of 'living-posters' for sharing and spreading the national and global influences of the living-educational-theories of Irish practitioner-researchers in enhancing professionalism in education.

Introduction

I want to begin by emphasizing the importance of recognizing cultural differences when ideas generated from within one culture are shared within another. There is always the danger of offering these ideas in a way that might unintentionally support a form of colonization. I am hoping to avoid this danger by acknowledging a difference between Irish and English cultures in the ways in which we share our embodied knowledge. By this I mean the knowledge that we express in what we are doing.

Lindová (2014) has focused on the importance of traditional oral narrative in Irish Folkore:

> Folklore and particularly oral narratives play an important role in lives of the Irish. They evoke amazement and attraction thanks to certain uniqueness and characteristic features for which the Irish can be easily recognized. The language that still persists in small Irish community in the West of Ireland is one of the attributes which the Irish can rightfully call their treasure for it had the unmistakeable position in forming the national consciousness in times of national upheavals that swept across Europe in the nineteenth century... I would like to demonstrate what influence and impact the folk tradition, particularly oral narratives had on forming national consciousness and identity in the Irish-speaking community. I would like to prove that there was a close bond between oral tradition and the Irish cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century. In my thesis I will be examining and analysing relations between the Irish-speaking oral tradition and its subsequent development in the Irish cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century.

I believe that your oral capacities in sharing your stories and ideas are the bedrock of your knowledge-creating capacities and your contributions to the professional knowledge-base of education. My own academic tradition has focused much more on representing ideas through printed text, with a much weaker focus on oral and embodied communications. I am suggesting that we could strengthen our contributions to the professional knowledge-base of education through drawing on the strengths of both traditions and cultures.

I am hoping that what you will do with the ideas, I shall now offer from my own academic tradition, is to engage with the ideas to strengthen them within the embodied knowledge you express from within your oral traditions. This offering is organized into 7 parts. I begin with Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) because this is one of the clearest and attractive representations of an action-reflection cycle and we are all thinking actively in our social contexts:

1) **Using Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) as an action reflection cycle in improving practice.**
2) **The messiness of action research – your creativity**

3) **Creating and sharing your living-educational-theory through your action research with values of humanity.**
4) **Enhancing your educational influences in learning with the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI).**
5) **Living-theory-posters and multi-screen SKYPEs**
6) **The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs)**
7) **Validity**

1) **Using Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) as an action reflection cycle in improving practice.**

One distinguishing feature of action research is an action-reflection cycles in which practitioners work out what they want to improve, how they are going to improve it, as they act what data will they collect to make a judgment on their influence, how will they evaluate their influence, how will they modify that concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluations. Here is a visual representation of an action-reflection cycle, produced by Belle Wallace (2000).

Action-reflection cycles may give the false impression that action research always follows a linear path. Action researchers face real-life issues that are rarely straight forward and linear. Real-life issues, and the valid stories of our learning, are complex and sometimes chaotic and messy, especially in the

creative or organic phases of our enquiries. The action-reflection cycles such as TASC can hep us to make sense of the chaotic and keep us connected to a relational dynamic relationship with the systemic. Because the systemic influences of sociohistorical and sociocultural pressures affect what we do and think, it is important to recognize these influences in our explanations.

2) The messiness of action research – your creativity

There is a messiness in creativity in research that needs to be embraced. This includes a feeling of chaos and of not immediately finding order. This is clearly shown in Tina Jacklin's introduction to action research, as a beginning teacher in 1999. Tina was a participant in an action research, masters credit course at Bishop's University, Quebec, Canada. Tina produced 5 drafts over 10 days for her masters credit. You can access the curriculum (Whitehead, 1999) at http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bishops/bish99.pdf .

I usually distinguish between writerly and readerly phases in producing a living-theory. In the writerly phase we clarify our meanings in the course of our writing. When we have finished a writerly draft it is usual to think that our writings are finished. The problem is that whilst we have clarified our understandings for ourselves, a reader often needs what we have clarified to be brought into an initial 'framing' for our writing with some introduction to show how our writings are being organized. I refer to this writing as a 'readerly' text, because you are bearing the reader in mind as you communicate your meanings.

Here is the 'messiness' of Tina's first of five drafts. You can access the final, successfully submitted writings (including all five drafts) at: http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bishops/tjpaperall.pdf

I include this to emphasize that you shouldn't be worried about having some 'perfect' writing before you share it for the responses of others.

Draft #1
getting ideas down

Changing Attitudes: Gaining Skills

Inexperienced, nervous, unprepared, excited, I faced my class of 13 students *who were* squished together in a corner of the library. This was definately not the ideal learning environment. How was I to create a sense of community in this small area ~~and~~ when I only saw them an hour a day? By the end of the first week of school I realized that the students I was working with had a strong dislike for school. They would say things like may-day may-day, I can't read/write, and I hate reading/writing. I needed to find a way to change their attitudes and subsequently improve their skills since 11 out of the 21 students were non-readers and all but two of the others were reading below level.

Soon my class grew to 21 students and I was given more time to work with them. It was at this time that I began collaborating with Brenda on a Books and Buddies program which was designed to develop reading and social skills through peer tutoring. I thought that this program accompanied with a great deal of encouragement and praise, fun activities in the classroom, and little homework would help to improve the students view of school.(Why I assigned little homework is linked to one of the reasons the children disliked school.)

A few months into the school year I was discouraged. I was still hearing from the children that they hated virtually everything at school including physical education and art. I discussed this with Brenda and she thought that there was a discrepancy between what the children were saying and what we were seeing in the classroom. They said they hated things but once they had began the task they seemed to enjoy themselves. (Old habits die hard.) This is when I began having the students write in a buddy journal, as Brenda had suggested. In this journal they were allowed to express things they disliked enjoyed, or thought needed to be improved on in the buddy program. It was in this journal that I began seeing that many of the students actually enjoyed taking part in reading buddies. They were having difficulty, at times, getting their buddy to listen and work. So we began sharing some of the difficulties and the successes we were having and how to solve some of the problems. The students shared a great deal and began helping each other solve problems. A real sense of community had developed in the classroom.

I really saw the improvement in my students' attitudes in March when a new student arrived in my classroom. She was having difficulty reading. When she came to read to me she said "I can't read, it's too hard." It was at this time that I sat back and realized that I hadn't heard those words in such a long time. The students had come so far. They were saying things like "don't tell me that word I can figure it out myself." One girl's public speech was titled 'I Love Books.' The students had really began to understand what reading was about. (See reading strategies and what is reading) ~~The students~~ had developed confidence as readers. This confidence was apparent after we tested their reading ability again in June. All of the kids were readers.

I new I had done my job in May when the student who had believed firmly all year that he hated all aspects of school, came up to me and said "I'm a good writer". I knew then that he had opened himself up to learning.

I reported this at the TCR in april not really knowing until after I heard Jean Clandinin's speech.

* sense of community win classroom
move into school then town.
2 months - observe other classrooms - neg pos be
2 months - observe playground
- video tape own class throughou
year & analyze (before - during - en
- global community
- what is community? What is
my place?
- community night - present for
community member sharing others.
Kids search out members to
come & share 1/month com. afternoo
(5 people each month) - videota
Kids go out to participate & report
on community events.
what is missing in our commu
why? What can we do about it?
Report to Council.

Events
- Clubs/Brownies
- Church
- dances
- musical, art, storytellers
- authors,

* present
support
- Job shadow
Community number
understanding
Resources - geography

- visit record
explore record - Current events - ? write for
record
Individual Attitude - Classroom to School to Comm.
Attitude toward learning.

Including the complexity, sometimes chaotic and messiness of one's life and learning, in one's explanation of one's educational influence strengthens the **validity** of the explanation. I shall focus later on enhancing the validity of an explanation. When I first proposed the idea of individuals creating their own living-educational-theories in the 1980s it was to emphasise differences between

the traditional view of an educational theory as a generalized explanation drawn from the conceptual explanatory frameworks of disciplines of education such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economic, politics, theology, leadership and management of education.

It might be helpful at this point if I clarify my meanings of learning, educational, educational influences and explanation as theory.

I use learning with is common meaning as the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. As I stress below not all learning is educational. By learning being educational I am meaning that the acquisition of knowledge or skills takes place with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. I focus on educational influence because of the importance of recognizing an intentional rather than a causal relationship between what a teacher does and what a pupil learns. The notion of influence acknowledges that the individual learner uses their imagination or creativity in responding to what a teacher is doing. I focus on explanations as theories and theories as explanations because of the importance of understanding why something is happening in the way that it does. If we can explain why something is happening it means that we increase the possibility that we can influence what is happening in a desirable direction.

The main difference between a theory of education and an individual's living-educational-theory is that explanations of educational influence in learning are **'derived'** from the conceptual abstractions of theories of education, whilst a living-educational-theory is the explanation generated by the individual to explain their own educational influence. Do please let me know if I am not communicating clearly this crucial difference before I focus on creating and sharing your living-educational-theory.

3) Creating and sharing your living-educational-theory through your action research with values of humanity.

Action research is usually distinguished as a methodology in the sense of the principles of organization that can explain how you carried out your enquiry. It refers to the general organizing principles of your enquiry. There are a number of distinct methodological approaches to research. I like the clarity of Cresswell's (2007) distinctions between the 5 methodological approaches of narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, case study research. I have responded to Cresswell's distinction in justifying the use of a living-theory methodology (Whitehead, 2016). In addition to the above methodologies I integrate insights from autoethnography and action research in the sense that these are research approaches that include the researcher in relation to the cultural influences that influence an enquiry.

Methodology is sometimes used incorrectly to refer to a method. There is a clear distinction between methodology and method where a method is a technique, such as an interview, a questionnaire or an action–reflection cycle that you apply in gathering and analyzing data. This application of a method is illustrated by the

use of action reflection cycle of the TASC wheel above. A methodology provides the rationale for how the research was carried out in generating theory. A methodology provides the theoretical analysis of the methods and principles associated with contribution to knowledge being made in the research. A methodology does not set out to provide solutions. It is worth repeating that a methodology is not the same as a method. A methodology offers the theoretical underpinning for understanding how the research was carried out.

As well as showing how you use action research in improving and researching your practice, you can also generate and share your explanation of your educational influences in your own learning, in the learning of others (such as pupils and colleagues) and in the learning of the social formations that influence your practice and understandings.

I stress the importance of the phrase 'educational influences in learning' because not all learning is educational. History contains many examples of where individuals and groups have learnt to behave in inhuman/evil ways. This is why I stress the importance of clarifying and sharing the values that constitute our learning as educational. For me, what is 'educational', involves learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. Crompton (2010) draws on Schwartz (1992, 2007) to distinguish between values that are 'intrinsic' and those that are concerned with problems larger than self. We can experience ourselves as 'living contradictions' when we are aware that we hold certain values yet are negating them in our practice. It isn't just the research process that is 'messy' but how we deal with our 'living-contradictions'.

I believe that everyone present today is seeking to live as fully as possible such values. These values are explanatory principles that we can use to explain why we are doing what we are doing and can be used as explanatory principles in explanations of our educational influences in learning. Because these values are often expressed in practice with a life-affirming energy, I am suggesting that we need visual data of our practice to include as evidence in our explanations of influence. By visual data I usually mean digital video that shows what we are doing in our educational practices. The majority of the meanings in academic writings are communicated solely through words on printed pages of text. I am claiming that to communicate the meanings of the expression of your embodied values in your educational relationships, you will need to include visual data to both show these expressions and to clarify their meanings with the help of the words you use.

Here is an example to show what I mean. It is a clip from a video recorded at the end of a lesson Moira Laidlaw gave in China. It shows Moira expressing a flow of loving warmth of humanity as she communicates with a student. Moira is a Professor for Life at Ningxia Teachers University and works as a tutor at the Open University in development studies.

1:03 minute video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno

I move the cursor backwards and forwards to my experience of the strongest empathetic resonance. I am using empathetic resonance as a research method to clarify the meanings of embodied expressions of value. In doing this I am aware of advocating the inclusion of digital visual data as evidence in our research accounts. I am thinking particularly of the inclusion of embodied expressions of value as explanatory principles in explanations of our educational influences in learning

I am claiming that a valid explanation of Moira Laidlaw's educational influences in learning will need to include the kind of visual data that shows her embodied expressions of her values. You can test the validity of this claim by accessing and responding to Moira's writings in which she includes such data, as evidence in her explanations of influence at:
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/laidlaw/moiralaidlawejoltsdec15.pdf.
By validity I am meaning that an explanation can withstand public criticism.

Many of the teacher-researchers I have worked with and supported have explained to me the importance of belonging to a community of enquirers. I now want to focus on the importance of NEARI for sustaining your enquiries and extending educational influences with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

4) **Enhancing your educational influences in learning with the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI).**

Many Teachers and other practitioner-researchers have told me that researching one's own practice can be rather lonely without the sustained and sustaining influence of belonging to a community which shares values of hope and trust and a commitment to share the different enquiries of individuals. In my experience, the initial focus on sharing non-accredited enquiries is the bedrock of their development into accredited writings. Whilst I advocate making a contribution to the professional knowledge-base of education through accredited masters and doctoral programmes, I know that these contributions rest on a willingness and commitment to share initial enquiries that are non-accredited.

For example, from 1996 to 2008, Jacqueline Delong supported both informal and formal research from her position as Superintendent of Schools in the Grand Erie Board in Canada. Jacqueline has shared these 8 Volumes of Passion in Professional Practice. These are accessible from:

http://schools.gedsb.net/ar/passion/index.html

I believe that browsing through this collection of stories from teacher-researchers in Canada will help you to feel that you belong, not only to a local group of teacher-researchers, but to a global movement of educators whose values, commitment and energy can help to sustain our own. NEARI researchers have already shown the significance of the educational knowledge that can emerge from a sustained community of enquiries. You can access some of the publications that show the determination of NEARI researchers to communicate their ideas more widely through their books and a report on action research to the Teaching Council of Ireland:

2015 Mary Roche
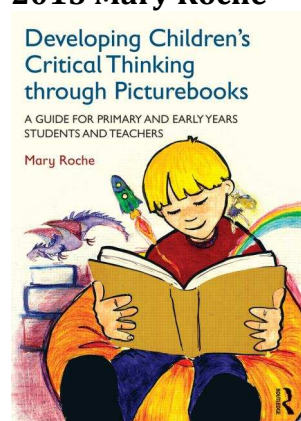
 Developing Children's Critical Thinking through Picturebooks

2012 Caitriona McDonagh, **Mary Roche**, **Bernie Sullivan**, **Mairin Glenn**
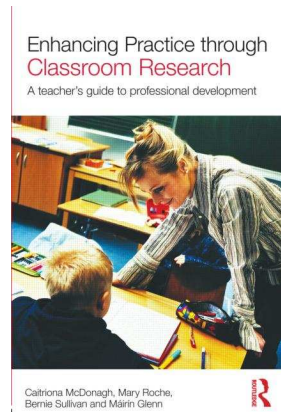
 Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research

2012 Máirín Glenn, Caitriona McDonagh, Bernie Sullivan, Mary Roche, with Professor Mark Morgan (2012)

Practice-based Research Encompassing
Professional Development Project
Revised Final Report (March 2012)

ACTION RESEARCH SUPPORTED BY THE TEACHING COUNCIL OF IRELAND

Accessible from:

http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Research/Documents/Practice-based-Research-Encompassing-Professional-Development-Project.pdf

Pip Bruce Ferguson (2015) is another founding member of NEARI who has contributed her understandings to building national and international action research communities of practice. One of Pip's living legacies, when she returns to New Zealand after three years at Dublin City University in 2017, is her sustained and sustaining influence in NEARI.

Whilst the informal and non-accredited enquiries of teacher-researchers are the bedrock of the accredited contributions to our professional knowledge-base, a profession does need an accredited knowledge-base and NEARI participants could contribute to its development.

Within NEARI you have a group of researchers who have already shown what it means to be awarded doctoral degrees for making pubic their embodied knowledge as educators. I refer to such practitioner-researchers as doctor educators. You can access their living-theory doctorates at:

Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy: interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just community of enquiry. (2007)
Mary Roche

A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality (2006)
Bernie Sullivan
Bernie Sullivan's PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realise our learning potentials? (2007)
Caitriona McDonagh
Caitriona McDonagh's PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice (2006)
Máirín Glenn
Máirín Glenn's PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

Sage Online First have published the following papers before the print version was published in the January 2016 issue of Gifted Education International (GEI). 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 below, all the papers were submitted successfully for masters credit in the Department of Education of the University of Bath. The Whitehead and Huxtable paper outlines our Living Theory approach to enhancing professionalism in education with the creation of living-educational-theories as transformational continuing professional development for Master Educators:

Marie Huxtable and Jack Whitehead – Editors Introduction: Educators Developing Talents to Contribute to Creating a Knowledge-base of a Profession of Educators
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/editorsintro.pdf

Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable
Creating a Profession of Educators with the living-theories of Master and Doctor Educators.
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/jwmh.pdf

Nina Clayton
How am I using my own understanding and development of gifts and talents to promote the learning of children?
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/nina.pdf

Kate Kemp
How have I come to recognise and develop my talents which are my gift to my colleagues and pupils?
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/kate.pdf

Joy Mounter
How do I recognise the move from the language of learning to the language of educational responsibility?
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/Joy.pdf

Sally Cartwright
How do I research my own practice?
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/Sally.pdf

My suggestions above for enhancing your educational influences in learning with the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) have focused on traditional ways of communicating ideas and extending influences through books and journals. I now want to suggest new ways of communicating, evolving and extending educational influences through social media with digital technology in living-theory-posters and multi-screen SKYPEs.

5) Living-theory-posters and multi-screen SKYPEs

a) Living-posters

Another way in which you could develop and share your embodied knowledge as educators in NEARI is through the creation and sharing of living-posters such as those below. You will see the lack of any 'template' for a living-poster with the uniqueness of each contribution:

From NEARI researchers
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aran/aranposters/1Irish2704.pdf

Member of EJOLTS (Educational Journal of Living Theories) Community - LINK

Drama in Education
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJ0vHaO4Rwc &
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzdtOlvyZu0

Life Skills Education
http://www.thecitizen.in/NewsDetail.aspx?Id=801 &
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgz82KHJyjk

The Living Educational Theory
http://www.actionresearch.net/rawal.shtml &
Volume 7(1): 53-81 www.ejolts.net

It is about children and always about the children. Whatever I do in education is about children. I want to make better the lives of the children ...I want to perfect my practice so I can improve their schooling. I want to imagine new ways of teaching so I can teach them well and they can learn well. I want be a first-rate teacher-facilitator so I can move teachers to teach the children well... innovative teaching methods... improved technique... effective curriculums...valuable research for a safer, beautiful world...
It is about the children always about the children

Video:
https://youtu.be/D6bltgA4-YA

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Action Research Network of America Conference- May 2015

From the Educational Journal of Living Theories

Jack Whitehead
Academic & practitioner
educational research

Branko Bognar
Teacher education,
creativity

Je Kan Adler-Collins
Nursing, caring

Moira Laidlaw
Emancipating
learners

Pip Bruce Ferguson
Staff development

Jackie Delong
Practitioner research

Jane Spiro
Teacher education,
creative writing

Swaroop Rawal
Teacher education,
drama

Mark Potts
Living Global Citizenship

Sigrid Gjotterud
Teacher education
community
development

Liz Wolvaardt &
Pieter du Toit
Values-based
supervision

Peter Mellett
Permaculture,
regenerative development

Joy Mounter
Academic librarianship, pedagogy

Sonia Hutchison
Sustainable leadership

Jacqui Scholes-Rhodes
Facilitating learning journeys

Marie Huxtable
Passion-led learning

The EJOLTS community (some of who you can see above). Between us we circle the globe and share a common passion to contribute to the flourishing of humanity through our practice, 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.

Educational Journal of Living Theories free access from http://ejolts.net/

You can access the homepage for the collection of living-posters with the guidance on how to produce and share your own at:

http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage061115.pdf

These living-posters have been shared in different international research events through multi-screen SKYPEs.

b) Multi-screen SKYPEs

The first sharing of the living-posters was on the 8th May 2015 Town Hall Meeting of the Action Research Network of the Americas in Toronto, convened by Jacqueline Delong and simultaneously at a workshop led by Marie Huxtable in London at the Higher Education Special Interest Group of the British Educational Research Association.

In this first illustration below the large screen shows Swaroop Rawal connecting and contributing from India to ARNA in Toronto. At one point, one of the face-to-face participants asked a question about the nature of living-educational-theory, Sonia Hutchison answered in a contribution from Bath, UK.

The second illustration is from a multi-screen SKYPE in a workshop convened by Sonia Hutchison at the Action Learning Action Research World Conference on the 7th November 2015, In Pretoria South Africa. This was coordinated by practitioner-researchers in Bath.

The third illustration is from a multi-screen SKYPE with the Sunday evening research support group on the 18th October 2015.

The research support group meets through multi-screen SKYPE conversations on Sunday evenings. The participants can vary. The screen-shot above shows Marie Huxtable in Bath, UK; Tammy Nichols in Cumbria, UK; Liz Campbell in Ontario, Canada; Arianna Briganti in Albania; Per Jensen in Denmark; Robyn Pound in Bath, UK; Sonia Hutchison in Bristol, UK; Jack Whitehead in Bath, UK.

6) Educational Journal of Living Theories

The multi-media Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) provides a forum for sharing living-educational-theories. Pip (Bruce Ferguson 2015, pp. 117-118), has already written about the significance of this Journal with its open reviewing process and I'm hoping that you will consider submitting your own accounts to EJOLTS. You can access:

 The current issue at http://ejolts.net/current

The archive of contributions since the first issue in 2008 at http://ejolts.net/archive

The Open Reviewing, EJOLTS Teams and Community Space of The Educational Journal Of Living Theories at http://ejolts.org

The Login Page for the Community Space of EJOLTS at http://ejolts.org/login/index.php

The issue of validity is important in all research. Researchers want their explanations to withstand criticism so they seek to strengthen the validity of their explanations. Living Theory action research is no exception.

7) Validity

When a practitioner-researcher makes a claim to knowledge in an explanation of educational influence it is important that the explanation is valid in the sense of being able to withstand justifiable criticism. One of the ways in which you can strengthen the validity of your explanations of your influence is to submit drafts of your writings to a validation group of some 3-8 peers. The numbers are not crucial but I have found that these numbers are manageable. You can strengthen the validity of your explanations by asking your validation group to respond to the following questions and for you to respond as your drafts evolve:

i)   How could I strengthen the comprehensibility of my explanation?
ii)   How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the claims that I make in my explanation?
iii)   How could I deepen and extend my sociohistorical and socioculture understandings of the influences in my practice and understandings?
iv)   How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing over time and interaction that I am living as fully as I can the values that I claim to hold.

One of the most important issue of validity in research concerns the standards of judgment that are used to justify a claim that an explanation is a contribution or an original contribution to educational knowledge. The branch of philosophy known as epistemology includes the standards of judgment that are used to justify the validity of a contribution to knowledge. In Living Theory research the values that are used as explanatory principles in an explanation of educational influence are also used as the living standards of judgment for evaluating the validity of a contribution to knowledge.

Concluding comments

Many teacher-researchers I have worked with have hesitated in sharing their draft writings because they feel they are confused, rather chaotic and less than 'perfect'. Through embracing the 'messiness' of action research I hope that I have encouraged you to see the importance of sharing your draft writings to enable others to participate with you and support you in the generation and evolution of your research accounts.

I also hope that I have persuaded you of the importance of sharing your explanations of your educational influences in learning. This sharing is to contribute to the professional knowledge-base of education and to spread the influence of the values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

Through belonging and contributing to the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) I have acknowledged how inspiring I have found the work of NEARI researchers in the creation and sharing of their living-theories and other publications. NEARI provides a space of trust, care and interest for a community of practitioners to share and support each others' individual enquiries.

With your help and commitment, NEARI will grow and extend the influence of humanizing values and understandings. NEARI can do this by focusing on what we are doing in our local educational contexts and through communicating globally with the help of social media to educators and other practitioners throughout the world.

If you wish to following up with any further questions do please e-mail me at jack@actionresearch.net .

I want to conclude with my thanks for offering me the opportunity to share some thoughts that I am hoping you have found both stimulating and persuasive in encouraging you to create and to share widely your living-theories from your action research into your educational influences, with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

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