Empowerment and action research: Personal growth, professional development, and social change in educational and community settings

Jack Whitehead, Liverpool Hope University, UK.

Notes for a keynote presentation to the 'The Seventh Annual Action Research Conference University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Science' . The theme of the conference is 'Empowerment and action research: Personal growth, professional development, and social change in educational and community settings.' 15th May 2010.

Introduction and context

First of all I want to express my thanks to the organizers of the 7th Annual Action Research Conference for the invitation to present this keynote on the theme of the conference on *Empowerment and action research: Personal growth, professional development and social change in educational and community settings'*. Such invitations allow me to share my passion for action research as a form of educational enquiry that carries hope for the future of humanity and my own. Part of this hope rests in my experience of the pooling of energy, values, skills and understandings in the accounts of action researchers around the world.

Using web-based resources, including visual narratives, I want to share some understandings of the significance of this pooling of accounts in terms of the theme of the conference. The web-based resources made available freely from http://www.actionresearch.net are flowing into this space as gifts from action researchers. The gifts are the narratives of learning as individual action researchers share their learning from their unique contexts as they seek to live as fully as they can the values they use to give meaning and purpose to their lives. The contexts vary from the local to the global. For instance, in the local context the conference marks the first study day in North America of the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN). You can access details of CARN from http://www.did.stu.mmu.ac.uk/carnnew/ and I hope to share some experiences from yesterday's CARN study here in San Diego, during the keynote.

In the global context the conference is taking place at the same time as the Education and Learning Virtual Networking Stream of the Eighth World Congress of the Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA), 6-9th September 2010 in Melbourne on 'Participatory Action Research and Action Learning: Appreciating our Pasts, Comprehending our Presents, Prefiguring our Futures'.

To participate in the Education and Learning Virtual Networking Stream of the ALARA Congress, click here.

 For my brief from ALARA click hereIn South Africa the conference on 'Action Research: Exploring Its Transformative Potential' of the Action Research Unit of Nelson Mandela University, takes place on the 19th-20th August 2010 with

The Action Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association with Prof. Margaret Riel as Chair is doing much to support the development and spread of action research as you will see from the new web-site at http://sites.google.com/site/aeraarsig/ar1world-blog .

In a recent visit to Durban University of Technology I met the Self-Study for Transformatory Higher Education (SeStuTHE) research group convened by Prof. Joan Conolly. I emphasized the importance of making public through the web, the living theory accounts of practitioner-researchers. I'm delighted to say that Snoeks Desmond from the University of KwaZula Natal has made public her completed doctoral thesis on *'A journey in family literacy: Investigation into influences on the development of an approach to family literacy'* at:

 http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/SnoeksDesmondphdopt.pdf

This thesis is the first living theory thesis to be supervised at Durban University of Technology. The epistemological implications for transforming educational theory through living educational theories have been explored in a keynote symposium at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference in 2009. You can access the presentations at the Keynote Symposium on Explicating A New Epistemology For Educational Knowledge With Educational Responsibility by clicking here.

You can also access the action research accounts of self-study researchers who have produced evidence-based accounts of their educational influences in learning in The Educational Journal Of Living Theories.

Having focused on some of the local and global contexts of action research I now want to consider some of the distinguishing characteristics of action research and their influences in empowerment and in the personal growth, professional development and social change in educational and community settings.

Action Research

I carried out my first action research project in 1976 in a local curriculum project entitled 'Improving Learning for 11-14 year olds in Mixed Ability Science Groups' (Whitehead, 1976 http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ilmagall.pdf). What distinguished this as an action research project was that the individual participants were all exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in the professional contexts of their educational practices with 11-14 year students in mixed ability groups. We all worked at improving and researching our practice with action-reflection cycles in which we:

    i)   expressed concerns when our values were not being lived as fully as we believed that we could do;
   ii) imagined possible ways forward and chose one possibility to act on.

iii) acted and gathered data on which to make a judgment on the effectiveness of our actions;

iv) evaluated our actions in terms of our influence in pupils' learning and in terms of living our values and understandings as fully as we could;

v) produced accounts of our learning and shared them with the group to enhance the validity of our accounts through the mutual rational controls of critical discussion.

In saying 'we' I want to stress the participatory nature of action research. In the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I hesitate before using 'we' in order to check that this is not experienced by others as impositional in the sense of violating their own sense of 'I'. I am stressing the importance of retaining the integrity and uniqueness of the individual 'I' in action research. In a living theory approach to improving practice and generating knowledge, the values of my 'I' are ontological in the sense that they are the values that give meaning and purpose to my life. They form the explanatory principles that clarifies what motivates me to do what I do when faced with the experience of their denial.

In 1953 there was one text book on action research in education. This was Stephen Corey's Action Research to Improve School Practices (Corey, 1953). In 2010, as I write, a google search shows 85,400,000 references to action research! This presentation is being made available on the web and it contains many urls to take you directly to the resources being referenced. I am hopeful that this will help in extending our interconnecting and branching channels of communication.

In relation to early insights that have influenced my understanding of action research I have benefitted greatly from Carr's and Kemmis' (1982) text on 'Becoming Critical: Knowing through action research' with their idea of action research as a self-reflective enquiry into improving practice, understanding the context in which the practice is located and in improving the social context. While valuing the insights from researchers of previous generations I also have a commitment to integrate the insights from the most advanced social theories of the day in the generation of my explanations of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. For example, I draw on Amartya Sen's (1999) distinction between an economic theory of human capital and an economic theory of human capability in the generation of explanations of educational influence in learning. I also use Polanyi's (1958, p. 327) insight in Personal Knowledge to make a decision to understand the world from one's own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgment, responsibly with universal intent.

I have called such explanations living educational theories (1989a & b) to distinguish these explanations generated by individuals from the explanations 'deduced' from the conceptual abstractions of propositional theories from the traditional disciplines of education. I hope that I am not only communicating clearly the nature of this distinction, by talking or writing about it but also demonstrating it in my form of life in this paper

A living educational theory is the unique explanation produced by an individual action researcher to explain their educational influences in learning. Such explanations cannot be 'deduced' from traditional theories in the sense of sets of determinate relationships between variables in terms of which a fairly extensive set of empirically verifiable regulations can be explanations.

In stressing the uniqueness of each individual's explanation I want to draw attention to a methodological implication of this uniqueness that has been highlighted by Dadds and Hart (2001) in their understanding 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, 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)

I have explained how I have integrated methodological inventiveness into a living theory methodology in a contribution to the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) on *Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories* at http://ejolts.net/node/80 . A living theory methodology is the unique way in which an individual explores the implications of asking, researching and answering a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in explaining their educational influences in learning. It includes action reflection cycles, processes for enhancing the validity of the researcher's accounts. It also includes the clarification of the embodied meanings of energy-flowing ontological values as explanatory principles and living standards of judgment in the course of their emergence in practice.

I like the way Professor Jean McNiff focuses on the importance of including the researcher's 'I' in the question to be researched. Her doctoral students from Limerick University have explicitly acknowledged her influence by the inclusion of 'living theory' in their titles. You can access details of Jean's publications at her website at http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ and access these living theories at http://www.jeanmcniff.com/reports.html . In a living theory approach to action research, each individual creates their unique explanation of their educational influences in learning in relation to their own autobiographies and their social, historical and cultural contexts. This is well illustrated by the way McNiff distinguishes action research in her publications and offers her living educational theory. Her doctoral students show her the educational influence she has in their learning by their acknowledgment of this influence in their own learning in the generation of their living educational theories.

Professor Moira Laidlaw's work introducing and developing a living theory approach to action research in China offers a further example. After 6 years working with the Voluntary Service Overseas in Guyan she was made Professor for Life at Ningxia Teachers University (http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/moira.shtml) which hosts China's Experimental Centre for Educational Action Research in Foreign Languages Teaching. Laidlaw introduced the idea of living standards of judgments into an epistemology of action research in her doctoral thesis on *How can I create my own living educational theory as I offer you an account of my educational development?* (see http://www.actionresearch.net/living/moira2.shtml). Laidlaw's commitment to supporting a living theory form of action research that is focused on enhancing the social good can be seen in her Professorial Inaugural Address at Ningxia Teachers University in 2006 on *How Might We Enhance the Educational Value of our Research-base at the New University in Guyuan?* Researching Stories for the Social Good (see http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/china/mlinaugural.pdf) . In recognition of this work she received the 'Friend of China' in 2004 from Premier Wen Jiabao.

The spread of a living theory approach to action research around the world owes much to the communicate power and influence of the internet. No one has done more in this field that Dr. Margaret Farren, a lecturer in e-learning at Dublin City University in the Republic of Ireland. Farren's original contribution to action research and living theory lies in her focus on a pedagogy of the unique and web of betweenness as living standards of judgment in her explanations of educational influence. Farren is breaking new ground in the use of multi-media technologies for presenting living educational theories and I do hope that you access her two web-pages at http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/ and http://83.70.181.166/joomlamgt/ . At http://83.70.181.166/joomlamgt/ you will see details of a three day workshop at Strathmore University in Kenya in which Farren is contributing to the extension of influence of a living theory approach to action research.

McNiff, Laidlaw and Farren continue to exert a creative and global influence in the empowerment of action researchers in the generation of their living educational theories. I have focused on the work of these action researchers and

their support from the generation of living theories because of their particular relevance to the field of education. In the living theory section of actionresearch.net at http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml you will also see the living theories of Je Kan Adler-Collins and Marian Naidoo who work in the Health sectors in Japan and the UK and Graham Van Tuyl who works in the business section as a change agent. A living theory approach to improving practice and generating knowledge is being used in a range of settings including those usually associated with education.

Empowerment

Action research is focused on both improving practice and generating knowledge. Power-relations are involved in both. Every social context we live and work in has its own distinctive constellation of power relations. In educational context these are often felt in oppressive regulative instructions of government associated with curricula and assessment.

In the UK for instance we have what is known as the House of Lords Merits of Statutory Instrument's Committee. Here is a recent statement that highlights a national concern with the 'myriad requirements being imposed on schools':

"Able, brilliant and skilled professionals do not thrive in an environment where much of their energies are absorbed by the need to comply with a raft of detailed requirements. …. the evidence that we have seen during this inquiry has highlighted the problems that are caused to schools when too little thought is given to the systematic need to rely so heavily on regulation, and too little effort is put into managing the overall impact of statutory instruments issued, and monitoring whether the myriad requirements being imposed on schools are being taken seriously and implemented on the ground. …. We recommend that DCSF should now look to shift its primary focus away from the regulation of processes through statutory instruments, towards establishing accountability for the delivery of key outcomes." (House of Lords, 2009, p.15)

Action researchers are generating knowledge. The status of this knowledge is linked to its legitimation in the Academy. In my early days as an educator and educational researcher I was faced with Academics who believed that the practical principles I used to explain what I was doing were at best pragmatic maxims that had a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more theoretical justification (Hirst, 1983, p. 18).

Some indication of how scholarship in educational research has moved on in valuing the practical principles of professional practitioners and researchers can be seen in the appointment of Dr. Joan Walton as the Director of the research Centre for the Child and Family at Liverpool Hope University, together with my own professorial appointment. We both share a commitment to supporting individual researchers in the generation of their living educational theories with their unique and living standards of judgment. We recognise that the living theories of individuals must be generated in collaboration with others if they are

to enhance the flow of values that carry hope for the future of humanity. As I write this I have in mind the qualities of an Ubuntu way of being that resists the egocentric and selfish 'I', through a commitment to community.

I like Foucault's ideas of the power of truth and the truth of power. As action researchers I think that we are likely to experience some oppression from power relations that are resistant to the inclusion of the knowledge-claims of practitioner-researchers. I am thinking of knowledge-claims that include the 'I' of the researcher and the embodied expressions of the energy-flowing values that distinguish the knowledge-claim as 'educational'. In my meaning of 'educational', learning is necessary but not sufficient to distinguish something as educational. I must also recognise that the learning includes values that carry hope for the future of humanity. History is littered with examples of learning that has been associated with violations of these values. Being born towards the end of the second world war in 1944 immediately brings the Holocaust to mind.

 I want to offer a way of thinking about empowerment that includes the recognition of the embodied expression of energy-flowing values that carry hope for the future of humanity.   I use the video-clip below, on 'responding to matters of power and academic freedom', to communicate meanings of the embodied expression of empowerment and energy-flowing values in a creative response to a feeling of defeat and humiliation in a matter of academic freedom (see also http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmanchester170308.htm).

In 1987, following a disciplinary hearing involving two professors from the Department of Education at the University of Bath I received a letter from the Secretary and Registrar stating 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, this statement was taken by the Board of Studies for Education as evidence of a prima facie breach of my academic freedom and reported to Senate. 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. 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 explaining a resistance to pressures that could constrain academic freedom.

Responding to matters of power and academic freedom

What the clip does not show is my feeling of defeat and humiliation as I initially walked to the door having failed to convince the working party of the inadequacy of their conclusion. As I reached the door a felt a flow of life-affirming energy overcoming the feeling of defeat and humiliation. This seemed to emerge from outside my conscious awareness. On the video you can see (and I hope feel) the energy and expression of embodied values of academic freedom and responsibility in my creative response to my experience of their denial.

Whilst such experiences can be painful, our creative responses in empowerment can lead to personal growth (see http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aerictr08/jwictr08key.htm)

These experiences can, as I feel sure that you will recognise, be hugely significant in our lives because they straddle that terrible paradox of human existence. Sometimes the greatest strides in human evolution are exacted at the price of terrible suffering. I use the term narrative wreckage to describe such experiences. Including such narratives in one's living theory can help to avoid the criticism that such experiences have been omitted in the telling of a 'smooth story of self'. Difficult and painful experiences can, paradoxically, offer rich material for educational, professional and political growth. My 1993 publication is all about this paradox and generating living educational theories (see http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jwgek93.htm).

Personal growth in educational and community settings

In focusing on the personal growth of the action researcher I want to draw your attention to the importance of living as fully as possible the values we use to give meaning and purpose to our lives. I think of these as our ontological values. In the living theories at http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml each

individual explains their personal growth in educational and community settings. They do this by focusing on their educational influences in learning as they seek to live their values as fully as they can. You will see that each individual recognizes themselves as living contradictions both in holding certain values yet denying them in practice and in living and working in social and environment contexts that are continuously generating contradictions between the values espoused by individuals and those that they are being constrained to live. For example a recent visit to the Kibera slum in Kenya and families with HIV/Aids highlighted such social and environmental contradictions. The contradictions were most intense in the provision of health care and educational services to young people in a context of the poverty of basic provision of clean water, hygiene, health care and education. Academics at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University are seeking to enhance well-being and to improve the quality of well-being in contexts of the HIV/Aids pandemic, using a living theory approach (Wood, Morar & Mostert, 2007; Wood 2010).

Professional development in educational and community settings

As well as the personal development of the action researcher, each living theory theses, dissertation and masters unit at:

http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml

and

http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml

explains the professional development of the researcher in their educational and community settings.

I want to draw your attention in particular to Terri Austin's (2000) Ph.D. Thesis. *'Treasures in the Snow: What do I know and how do I know it through my educational inquiry into my practice of community?'* (http://www.actionresearch.net/living/austin.shtml)

In her Abstract Austin combines both her educational and community settings when she writes:

Set in a narrative context, I present a living picture of helping to form and work with communities of students, parents, teachers, and teacher researchers which provides the life-situations in which I created my own knowledge and strive to identify and live out my values.

Austin is Head of a Charter School in Alaska and the particular relevance of Austin's work to the present context in the USA is because of the upsurge of interest in Charter Schools and her values of community.

I also want to draw your attention to the professional development in educational and community settings of the living theories of Marian Naidoo and Eden Charles.

Marian Naidoo (2005) in her doctorate *I am because we are (A never ending story). The emergence of a living theory of inclusional and responsive practice,*

focuses on the living standard of judgment of a passion for compassion. You can access Naidoo's thesis at http://www.actionresearch.net/living/naidoo.shtml . With the help of video-clips of Marion and George, an Alzheimer's patient and her husband carer, Naidoo communicates her meaning of a passion for compassion. As I move the cursor backwards and forwards along this brief clip I will show how this technique can be used to communicate the meanings of life-affirming energy with values (Huxtable, 2009; Whitehead, 2010).

Eden Charles (2007) in his doctorate, *How Can I bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard Of Judgment Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition,* focused on bringing the South African way of being of Ubuntu into the Academy as a living standard of judgment. You can access Charles' thesis at http://www.actionresearch.net/living/edenphd.shtml . The significance of Charles' living theory for professional development in educational and community settings is in his understanding of the relational qualities of Ubuntu that are necessary in moving beyond decolonization through societal reidentification and guiltless recognition. Charles embraces insights from critical race theory and theories of decolonization in a creative response to the learning of social formations that can move beyond decolonization into forms of social order that carry hope for the future of humanity. Such insights are vital for social changes that are seeking to enhance the expression of such values.

Social change in educational and community settings

I want to focus here on the work of:

Phillip Tattersall, an environmental activist who has developed a community based audit (http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/philtattersallcba3148.pdf),

Alan Rayner, the originator of the idea of natural inclusionality (http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arjwdialtoIncl061109.pdf),

 Andrew Henon, a socially engaged artist whose recent publications include 'Creativity Works' (http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/henon/creativityworkslowah.pdf)

Phil Tattersall (2007) has this to say about a process of community based audit (CBA) in the abstract of his paper:

CBA is an experiential tool for empowering citizens to undertake disciplined inquiry into issues relating to natural resource planning and management. In making a case for CBA, the author argues that the now serious discontent and conflict surrounding natural resource management in Tasmania are the result of numerous instances where management decisions have led to adverse environmental and social outcomes. The author argues that such outcomes are in fact symptoms of a more serious problem once solved could lead to reduced conflict and a better way forward.

It is argued that the notion of certainty embedded in present frameworks

underpinning government legislation, natural resource planning and management has led to unrealistic expectations on the part of industry, government and the community. For instance, there is the expectation that resource planning and management systems can and should deliver outcomes that are risk free. Numerous CBA audits have shown conclusively that such assumptions are wrong. The author argues that decision-making frameworks need to be redesigned to include provision for those cases where the facts are uncertain. While the author sees Post Normal Science as one way to achieve this (through its use of expanded per review processes), he believes that this is still a distant hope in the Tasmanian context. CBA is therefore proposed as a rational process that could take us toward the adoption of such participative strategies by tackling the way in which the concept of certainty is used.

Drawing on Tattersall's insights into the nature of community based audit can, I am suggesting, help to extend the influence and educational significance of our action research. By contributing to the mobilization of a community-based audit we could move beyond the boundaries of our institutional practices in schools, universities and other workplaces, to ground our enquiries within a wider understanding of community such as that advocated by Alan Rayner in his understanding of natural inclusionality.

Alan Rayner has been the inspiration in the development of my understanding of natural inclusionality as a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as continuous, connective, reflective and co-creative. In our paper on *From Dialectics to Inclusionality: A naturally inclusive logic for environmental and educational accountability* we state our positions in the summary:

The last 2,500 years have seen an unresolved conflict between propositional and dialectical logicians. Here, whilst acknowledging the partial validity of their views, we trace the confrontation between these logicians to an unrealistic premise that both paradoxically share: the supposition that nature is completely definable into discrete, mutually exclusive categories of subject and object. This exclusion of the middle ground is deeply embedded in orthodox theories and practices of science, theology, education and governance as well as in our mathematics and language. Whereas it leads propositional logicians, following Aristotle, to accept one statement about or perceived entity in reality as necessarily 'true' or 'present' and to reject the other as 'false' or 'absent', it leads dialectical thinkers to accept contradictory statements as the nucleus of an inherently ambiguous and pluralistic Nature. In this paper we illustrate the reciprocity of an educational conversation in which we are seeking to clarify and communicate our meanings, through the natural logic of inclusionality, where each flows responsively in the others' receptive influence.
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arjwdialtoIncl061109.pdf

My thinking of empowerment and action research and about personal, professional and social change in educational and community settings and been transformed by my understanding of nature inclusionality. Until 2000 I worked with insights from both propositional and dialectical logics where proponents of each would deny the rationality of the other's position. Since comprehending the living logics of inclusionality I have understood the power of a relationally

dynamic awareness to include insights from both propositional and dialectical theories without denying the rationality within or between these different logics. (see (see http://brs.leeds.ac.uk/cgi-bin/brs_engine?*ID=13&*DB=BEID&*DD=Document:%2010%3CBR%3E&*TH=BEIT&*TX=Y&*HI=N&*UZ=000166811[DOCN]&*QX=~~%27WHITEHEAD%27[AUTH])

I have seen Andrew Henon living these insights of natural inclusionality in his life as a socially engaged artist.

Andrew Henon has been influential in the development of my understanding of the significance of a social engaged artist in generating social change in educational and community settings. As the editor of the project 'Creativity/Works' Henon has this to say:

*The Creativity/**WORKS** project has engaged with children and young people from early years to age 25, introducing a range of arts projects that link in with their families and communities, as well as involving them in designing and developing projects that they themselves have identified as important.*
The project has worked in areas of most need and the widening of access and inclusionality has been a main motivational core value and principle in an ongoing action research reflective process.

The project was supported by a funding partnership including Arts Council England (South West) Norton Radstock Town Council, Keynsham Town Council, Bath & North East Somerset Council and Barnardos.

The project was run in a range of partnership workings and contexts with; APEX, Off the Record Counselling and Off the Record Young Carers Services, Project 28, BANES In Care Services, Timeout Keynsham, Writhlington School, Timsbury Youth Club, Radstock Youth Centre, Bristol Alcohol Drugs Advisory Service, Integrated Youth Support Services, Fringe Art Bath, art/works Festival committee, Snowhill Community, Somer Housing, Health Visitor Service, London Road Partnership, Boom Stage, Club Flix, Suited & Booted & The Big Lunch.

*With thanks to all those people who have contributed both in the project and within this publication. With special thanks to Sue Fairhirst Graphics, Karen Dews Photographer and the **nesa** team .Edited by Andrew Henon Lead artist and project manager Creativity/**WORKS.***

You can access Creativity/Works at:

http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/henon/creativityworkslowah.pdf

I think that the brilliance in this project can be seen in the wide variety of community groups being brought together to share their experiences and learning. One of the contributors, Sonia Hutchison, as Manager of a Young Carer's Network contributes her understandings of how to pool expressions of life-affirming energy, values and understandings. You can see more details of Sonia's work and insights at http://www.spanglefish.com/soniahutchison/ as she asks, researches and answers her question, *How can I improve my practice as a Chief*

Executive working with carers and their families creating my living theory of caring?

As we continue our exploration of *'Empowerment and action research: Personal growth, professional development, and social change in educational and community settings'* I want to emphasise the importance of sharing our own living theories of caring on the web. Through pooling flows of life-affirming energy, values, skills and understandings I think that action researchers around the world are already showing that they are making significant differences to enhancing their own well-being, the well-being of others and the well-being of the social formations in which we live and work. Looking around our local and global contexts there is no shortage of spaces, places, relationships and individual lives that we can contribute to improving. Where we may hesitate is in seeing the relevance of sharing locally and globally the narratives of our lives in which we are holding ourselves accountable to living our values as fully as we can. I hope that the gifts of the narratives of others who are doing this, I have shared with you today have convinced you of the urgency of sharing your own.

References

Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1982) Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research. Melbourne; Deakin University Press.

Dadds, M. & Hart, S. (2001) Doing Practitioner Research Differently, p. 166. London; RoutledgeFalmer.

Henry, C. (1991) Reflections at the end of the Congress: If action research were tennis, in Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1991) Action Learning for Improved Performance. Key contributions to the first world congress on action research and process management, pp. 102-115. Brisbane, AEBIS Publishing.

Hirst, P. (Ed.) (1983) Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines. London;RKP

House of Lords (2009) The cumulative impact of statutory instruments on schools: Report with evidence. The Stationery Office Limited: London. Retrieved 8 May 2009 from http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/mar/13/lords-report-dcsf

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 2008 from http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/huxtable/mh2009beraRI107.pdf

McNiff, J. (2007) My story is my living educational theory, in Clandinin, J. (Ed.) Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping Methodology, Thousand Islands, London, New Dehli; Sage.

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

Polanyi, M. (1958) Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. London; Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Tattersall, P. (2007) What is Community Based Auditing and How Does it Work? *J. Tas. Comm. Res. Auditors Inc*, *4(2), 31-48*.

Whitehead, J. (1989a) Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, "How do I improve my practice?'. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 19(1), 41-52,

Whitehead, J. (1989b) How do we Improve Research-based Professionalism in Education? A question which includes action research, educational theory and the politics of educational knowledge. 1988 Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association. *British Educational Research Journal,* 15(1), 3-17.

Wood, L. A. (2010) The Transformative Potential Of Living Theory Educational Research. Educational Journal of Living Educational Theories. 3(1) in press.

Wood, L. A., Morar, T. & Mostert, L. (2007) From rhetoric to reality: the role of living theory action research in transforming education*. Education as Change.* 11(2):67-80.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1991) Action Learning for Improved Performance. Key contributions to the first world congress on action research and process management. Brisbane, AEBIS Publishing.