Keynote for the BERA Research Methodology SIG event on *Action Research – Research into Action* on 24ᵗʰNovember, 2021

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Abstract

This keynote should be of particular interest to professional educators and other educational-practitioners who want to develop their professionalism. We will introduce Living Educational Theory Research as Continuing Professional Development and illustrate the use people working in a variety of fields and contexts have made of it to fulfil their professional responsibilities to improve their practice and contribute to the growth of a global educational-practitioner knowledgebase. This responsibility includes the living, as fully as possible, their values of human flourishing in life-long learning and in living a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others as global citizens (Whitehead, 2021).

The keynote to tbe BERA SIG, on research into action, supports and responds to the statement by BERA (2019) welcoming 'alternative and new ways of engaging with research which demonstrates a non-traditional approach to academic presentation'. The presenters will invite participants into an educational research conversation for sharing an understanding of education as a life-long, values-laden practical process. Implications, for professional educators and other educational-practitioners, of researching their practice to improve it and creating new educational knowledge as the basis of their CPD programme, will be explored. This will include considering the practical importance for teachers focussed on improving their classroom practice and head teachers focussed on improving their practice leading and managing their schools of such CPD programmes.

The presentation will include an introduction to Living Educational Theory Research:

Living Educational Theory Research (Whitehead, 1989) is a form of practitioner, self-study educational research. Insights from other methodologies, such as Action Research, Narrative Inquiry and Auto-ethnography, are drawn on and insights integrated where they help to take the research forward. The educational knowledge created by Living Educational Theory researchers contributes to knowledgebases drawn on by professional practitioners working in diverse fields of practice, cultures and international contexts.

Many have engaged in Living Educational Theory Research as part of their Masters programme (see https://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml for examples). However, the first full Living Educational Theory Masters programmes were created by Mounter and validated by Newman University, Birmingham in 2019 (Mounter, 2019; Mounter et al., 2019). Mounter began her own Masters CPD programme as a teacher and completed it as a head teacher. She successfully submitted her dissertation, 'As a Headteacher Researcher how can I demonstrate the impact and self-understandings drawn

from Living Theory Action Research, as a form of Continual Professional Development in education?' and graduated from the University of Bath, December 2012.

Mounter's motivation, for dedicating time and energy to her Masters, came from her passion for developing the best possible educational experiences, opportunities and relationships for children. Her experience as teacher and head teacher, of Living Educational Theory Research as Continuing Professional Development, led to her wanting other professional educators and educational-practitioners to have the opportunity and support to develop their own living-educational-theories.

Mounter designed The Living Educational Theory Masters programmes to enable practitioners to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). The programmes were designed to extend their scholarship, and their intellectual and practical skills and knowledge and so enhances their ability to fulfil their professional responsibility. This responsibility included improving their practice and contributing to the evolution of a global educational knowledgebase. Masters and Doctorates, by practitioner's wanting to live their values as professional practitioners, can be accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml . These writing provide the evidence of engagement in practitioner, self-study educational research – irrespective of whether they work in Education.

Here is the action-reflection planner we use to support the generation of living-educational-theories within inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?

HOW DO I IMPROVE WHAT I AM DOING?

ACTION-REFLECTION PLANNER FOR IMPROVING LEARNING AND GENERATING A LIVING-EDUCATIONAL-THEORY

NAME
SITE OF PRACTICE

Living Educational Theory researchers usually ask questions which are directed at improving the quality of their own practice, their understanding of their practice and the social context in which the practice is located. The action planner is usually organised through discussions which help to clarify the nature of the enquiry, 'How do I improve..............?', into questions of the form,

1) What is your concern/What do you want to improve?

2) What are your reasons for your concern?

3) What might you do to improve your practice?

4) How will you know that your practice has improved? How are you going to find out? ie;

What kind of data will you need to collect to enable you to
make a judgement on the outcomes of your practice in terms of
the quality of your own or teachers' and/or pupils' learning?
5) What kind of resources will you need to enable you to implement your plan?

6) Which colleagues might you ask to join a validation group of some 3-8 individuals
to help you to strengthen the validity of your draft evidence-based explanation of your
educational influences in your own learning and in the learning of other. Your
explanations could be improved with the help of responses to the following questions:

How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
How could I strengthen the data I gather and the evidence I use to justify any
claims I make in my explanations of educational influences in learning?
How could I deepen and extend my understanding of the sociohistorical and
sociocultural influences in my workplace that influence my work and
understandings?
How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing
that I am living my values as fully as possible?

(Accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arlivingtheoryplanner.pdf)

Session format

If the technology permits, following our introduction we will invite participants,
working in pairs, to outline an area of their practice they want to improve and then
return to the whole group to summarize what they have understood of their partner's
research focus with any insights about the values their partner uses in working to
improve their practice..

The format of the presentation will be developmental, taking participants on a journey
from developing a question that is important to them concerned with improving their
practice, to formulating the first steps they could take to systematically begin to explore
their question and how they can develop their living-educational-theory research and
make a contribution to a global educational-practitioner knowledgebase. The intention
is to extend and deepen the knowledge of participants of their own and each others'
research with :

- Educational research literacy (including ideas drawn from Szplit & Boyd, edited
  book, Developing Teachers' Research Literacy).
- The use of various research methods such as those developed in Action
  Research, Narrative Enquiry and Auto-ethnography.
- Data collection and analysis and how digital, visual data of practice can be used
  to clarify and communicate the life-enhancing ontological and relational values
  that give their professional practice meaning and purpose that they use as
  explanatory principles of educational influence and standards of judgment.
  (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006 a & b).

- How to produce and make public multi-media valid explanations of educational influences in learning as contributions to professional knowledge with values of human flourishing.
- Where to find support and information following the presentation.

Resources to support this deepening and extending of knowledge of Living Educational Theory Research can be accessed from:

http://www.actionresearch.net

with particular reference to:

i)   The homepage of living-posters:
        https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf
ii)   Living Educational Theory Theses and Dissertations:
        https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml
iii)   The Educational Journal of Living Theories:
        https://ejolts.net/about
iv)   Jack Whitehead's writings 1967-2021:
        https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml
v)   Resources from the Network Educational Action Research Ireland.
        http://www.eari.ie/resources-to-help-with-the-action-research-process/

Access to the living-posters' homepage gives you access to the guidelines on producing your own living-poster and the details of how to share your own with the global network represented on the homepage. You can include on your poster the live links to your webpages, writings and video-clips. If you decide to engage in a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development, any criticisms that your explanations of educational influence are merely subjective and anecdotal can be overcome through the following ideas on rigour and validity.

Rigour and validity

Winter's six criteria of rigour (1989), Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity and Popper's (1975) mutual rational control of critical discussion will be introduced to show how to enhance the validity and rigour of Living Educational Theory research as an essential feature of the CPD process.

See the Third Cycle of Action Research on Relevance, Rigour and Validity at
https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/95contents.pdf:

> *3.1 Improving learning in schools - relevance of data. 68*
> *3.2 Improving the rigour of your research. Peggy Kok. 76*
> *3.3 Improving the validity of your account. Martin Forrest. 83*

Significance for practice, policy and theory

The significance of the keynote is in the framework for professional educators to develop a CPD programme that is focused on improving their practice and contributing

to educational theory and local, national and international discourses concerning the development and implementation of policy (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016; Whitehead, 2020). The significance has been explored in a response to the question:

How could your living-educational-theories from your continuing professional development contribute to enhancing professionalism in education?, in the keynote (Whitehead, 2021) to the Professional Development Service of Teachers (PDST) meeting of the 11th November 2021. Retrieved from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwpdstkeynote111121.pdf

We are highlighting pages 4-8 of this keynote to emphasise the importance of the work of the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) in exploring the implications for practice, policy and theory of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development.

Whitehead (1989a) first presented his ideas on the role of educational research in improving research-based professionalism in education, in his presential address to BERA. He further developed his analysis in his most often referenced paper on creating a living-educational-theory from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'

In making a clear distinction between education research and educational research we distinguish education research as research that is carried out within the conceptual frameworks and method of validation of the disciplines of education such as the philosophy, sociology, psychology and history of education. We also place within education research the contributions to knowledge being made within the frameworks and methods of validation of the economics, politics, management and leadership of education. We use the term educational research to refer to research that is generating and testing the explanations of an individual's educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. The reason for making this distinction has been highlighted by Paul Hirst (1983, p. 18) where he writes about the principle of the disciplines approach that replaced the practical principles used by teacher, to explain what they were doing, by the conceptual frameworks of the disciplines of education. Over 20 years after Hirst recognised the mistake in the disciplines approach to Educational Theory, Whitty, in his Presidential Address to BERA continued to pressurise BERA for the dominance of education research over educational research:

> *One way of handling the distinction might be to use the terms 'education research' and 'educational research' more carefully. In this paper, I have so far used the broad term education research to characterise the whole field, but it may be that within that field we should reserve the term educational research for work that is consciously geared towards improving policy and practice..... One problem with this distinction between 'education research' as the broad term and 'educational research' as the narrower field of work specifically geared to the improvement of policy and practice is that it would mean that BERA, as the British Educational Research Association would have to change its name or be seen as only involved with the latter. So trying to make the distinction clearer would also involve BERA in a re-branding exercise which may not necessarily be the best way of spending our time and resources. But it is at least worth considering.* (Whitty, 2005, p. 172-173)

This pressure can also be seen in the American Educational Research Association where the executive director has been pressurising editors of AERA publications to replace educational research by education research.

By adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development I am suggesting that professional practitioners could resist this pressure whilst continuing to affirm the importance of educational research being focused on the generation of valid, evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning. This approach is urgently needed to ensure that our educational research community in BERA continues to focus on enhancing the flow of values of human flourishing in explanations of educational influences in learning.

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