

Review Of Caitriona McDonagh's Doctoral Thesis, 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

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Caitriona McDonagh's doctorate was awarded by the University of Limerick in 2007. In her Abstract, Caitriona explains that her thesis is a narrative account of how Caitriona improved her teaching of pupils with specific learning disability, as a resource teacher in a primary school. The originality of Caitriona's thesis is in the generation of a living theory of learning to teach for social justice, within a context of normative theories and practices, which prevented the realisation of her pupils' and her own learning potential. This thesis is highly relevant today in the context of the 1st Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy: Towards and ecology of knowledges, to be held in Cartagena, Columbia on the 16th June 2017, with de Sousa Santos (2014) as the keynote speaker. Caitriona McDonagh's research shows how a living theory of learning to teach for social justice can offer Santos, and others, a way of moving on from the critical analyses of social sciences, through a practitioner-researcher's commitment to improve their practice, whilst researching it.

Caitriona links her research commitment to her Christian values of justice, freedom, equality, an ethic of change for a better social order, and the recognition of the uniqueness of the individual. Caitriona explains how these values inform her life and work, and have become the living standards by which she judges the quality of her research.

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I particularly like the clarity with which Caitriona explicates the claims to knowledge in her thesis:

I explain my self-study action research methodology as a living transformational process. My findings about my pupils' and my own learning offer new conceptualisations about the capacity of pupils to learn in their own ways, and about reconceptualising metacognition against normative theories in contemporary literatures. I have deepened my understanding of learning and knowledge creation processes through dialogical interactions, and developed new understandings about forms of theory and logic, and the relevance of living theory to changing practice.

I am claiming that the significance of my research is grounded in my capacity to show how I can enable children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to learn through person-centred pedagogies. This has potential implications for new forms of practice and theory in teaching children with special educational needs. A distinctive feature of my account is my explanation for how my Christian values have transformed into my critical epistemological standards of judgement, and the development of a living theory of practice that enables me to account for my educational influence in my pupils' and my own learning.

Caitriona's post-doctoral living-theory research over the past ten years has included being a founder member of the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI). You can appreciate the educational influence of Caitriona's sustained commitment to living her values as fully as possible at <http://www.eari.ie/>.



Video 1: Caitrion McDonagh introducing her thesis.

<https://youtu.be/iVEwJ1NbmTY>

Reference:

de Sousa Santos, B. (2014) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London; Paradigm Publishers.

McDonagh, C.. (2007) *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*. Retrieved 30 May 2017 from <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=48>