A self-enquiry: towards the development of my living-educational-theory research

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Abstract

This article is intended as an account of my educational journey that led me from being a passive learner to become the researcher of my own learning processes. I explore two of my relationally-dynamic values (Laidlaw, 2018a) for which I wish my work to be held accountable: hope and responsibility. By looking back at the three years spent studying for the M.Sc. in Development Management (DM) and the few months that followed the submission of my dissertation, I disclose the difficulties, the struggles and the joys of slowly becoming the subject of my own enquiry. The interaction I have with DM as a discipline slowly shifts from being a passive relationship to becoming a living ontological dimension in my enquiry. This leads me to recognise and appreciate the importance of the aesthetic stance in my encounter with inspirational reads. Moving from the growing emergence of ontological questions, a developing sense of being a living contradiction, and the engagement with the aesthetic dimensions of my own reading experience, I present the subsequent stage of my research: the writing of my Ph.D. proposal in Living Theory research. In it, I stress the necessity to start my research from a self-enquiry, intended as the search for and understanding of my own 'I'. I see the values of hope and responsibility as central in the development of my self-enquiry, which is contributing to the development of my own living-educational-theory research. This offers me the opportunity to consider values as explanatory principles in the explanation of the meanings of my actions; it also requires me to engage in a central Living Theory research question, 'how can I improve my practice?', which I have found to be linked with issues regarding self-individualization and self-definition (Jung, 1962).

Keywords: Self-enquiry; Living Theory research; Hope and responsibility; Aesthetics in reading; Development management.

Introduction

This article is an account of a process which I live in relation to finding my own voice. It also discloses the relevance of educational influences experienced through personal encounters with both people and disciplines. It is, above all, an account of my journey towards Living Theory research, which requires me to make explicit the values that inform my understandings (Whitehead, 2018). In my case such relationally-dynamic values (Laidlaw, 2018a) are hope and responsibility. Throughout this article I hope that a constellation of other values (openness, honesty, love, care, feeling moved, empathy, gender empowerment, respect and curiosity) might be seen emerging in relation to my two core values (Whitehead, 2018). I consider such a constellation as a 'declension' of hope and responsibility. I use the term declension in reference to the Latin and Greek grammatical structure: "the variation of the form of a noun" (The Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 1992, p. 338). Openness, honesty, love, care, feeling moved, empathy, gender empowerment, respect and curiosity are the 'means-values' through which my two core values find expression and meaning. In this sense this constellation finds its well-spring (its original form) in the relationally-dynamic source of hope and responsibility. These two values have inspired the writing of this article and have guided me in choosing, among the many possible, the understanding of both Development Management (DM) and Aesthetics, which I rely on throughout the paper whenever I mention my encounter with these two disciplines. Hope and responsibility have been the living standards of judgments (Laidlaw, 1996) upon which I have based my understanding of such disciplines over the possible others and which I present at the end of this introduction.

This article tells how I have come to realize how my lived experiences and knowledge are not only influenced by my values and encounters but are also the result of the socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts in which I live and operate. It is, therefore, to be read as the starting point of a Living Theory research (Whitehead et al., 2019), whereby I see my self-enquiry, aimed at the search for and understand my own I, as the necessary initial and clarifying step to be taken before engaging in the development of my living-educational-theory.

Overall, through my self-enquiry, I strive to become aware of my own "educational development", as well as to understand my own I, through an "evaluation" and recollection of my past experiences (Whitehead, 2018, p. 27). This paper is my own contribution to this endeavour; it represents the process towards the, "I's intention (a human goal) to produce something valued which is not yet in existence" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 27). I cannot claim that I can now understand my own 'I', but I am becoming aware of my own educational development, which in this paper is represented by extracts of my own diaries, private correspondence, written assignments and my M.Sc. dissertation. Those materials, which I have intentionally left with grammatical errors, have been for me the source for an evaluation of my learning processes. They are included in the body of this article as a form of accountability in relation to the claims I make. The understanding of and search for my own I remains my "personal human goal" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 27), something to strive towards, through a growing awareness of my own educational development.

I am aware that this paper might be read as an account of a "self-serving self" (Mounter et al., 2019, p. 92). However I believe that it is in the values of hope and

responsibility, which I will define below, that reset the possibility of considering my account having a wider scope that, in Living Theory research terms, might contribute to "the flourishing of humanity" (Whitehead, 2018).

Hope and Responsibility

In this article the value of hope is represented by the wish that my personal account, even in its small scale, might be seen and recognised by others as a site of "connection and communication" (Thomas, 2015, p. 70). Despite the contextual differences that individuals have in living their lives, some similarities in experiencing emotional struggles and human fragilities might be found. By establishing connections with this text (Thomas, 2015), I hope that my paper might be contributing, however marginally, to a reduction of the loneliness and isolation (Harris, 2015) that seem to characterize our contemporary lives, built upon "walls and fences" (Bradatan, 2011).

I hope this article might be read as a metaphorical place from which possibilities for encounter might arise, based on the realisation that by honestly exposing our experiences, feelings and difficulties to others, we might find inherently human affinities that can transcend our differences. From this, "shared human possibilities" might arise, in which "the self and the *other* are brought together" (Quarles Van Ufford and Giri, 2003, pp. 253-4) to celebrate the world as a place for shared responsibilities, towards knowing better for acting better, based on universal reciprocities (Chambers, 2017).

My hope is based on the potentials I see in empathetic validity (Dadds, 2008), "the potential of practitioner research in its processes and outcomes to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other" (p. 279). This paper is already the outcome of a process of social validation as others have read it, both as friends and as critics (Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Most of their comments have been integrated in this final version of the article and those suggestions that I have not included have been discussed through a dialogical relationship. The overall account I give is a tale of an inner and personal validation through which I aim to disclose the journey towards taking responsibility for the rigour of my own perspective and claims (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). There is however, greater scope for public validation once this article is published. It is impossible to predict how many readers, if any, will engage with me; but I hope that this paper might be read as a metaphorical place in which people can "look at one another" realising that "they are all children of humanity" (Tolstoy, 1869, p. 1036), and might establish with the author further contact about the empathetic validity of her own claims. I would like my potential readers to engage in the following question: "Do you see hope and responsibility taking shape in this article?". I wish not only to be held accountable on those two values but also to be tested on the validity and clarity of my own claims in relation to my two ontological values.

However, I do see some potential difficulties arising in relation to social validation applied to a self-enquiry. Whilst others can contribute with their questions and suggestions to the improvement of the researcher's claims (Whitehead & McNiff 2006), I do believe that the researcher's personal validation should occupy a central position in a self-enquiry as he/she is ultimately the intimate actor of an inner discovery; his/her own pains towards making public a very private journey remain in my view something deeply sacred. To me they seem sometimes rich in uncommunicable elements which contribute to the person

he/she is in the present, wishing for better understanding of his/her own personal knowledge.

I see this article as an act of *responsibility* which finds one of its expressions through writing (Tighe, 2005). There are different kinds of responsibilities that are at the source of my writing, that are relationally intertwined with a sense of hope and related to the different identities I live in my daily life. It is through the development of my self-enquiry that I am becoming increasingly aware of my own identities and of how such an awareness is related to an emergent understanding of my own learning and educational development. Whilst generally Living Theory research focuses on a defined and established practice, in the case of this paper I try to shed light on my own struggles to define what is my own practice, whilst not having an institutionalised and recognised position. It is, therefore, an account of an evolving and emerging awareness of my own self, embodied in my own educational development.

As a mother of two small children with whom I engage in long conversations about how to be in the world, I increasingly feel that I cannot only ask from them certain kinds of actions and behaviours, but also that I must make my own contribution to this process "coming to understand" the public "put(ting) private thoughts in to the public domain" (Tighe, 2005, p. 8), and thereby be held accountable. I am aware that they are far too young to be able to appreciate the content of this article, but I want to leave them something more than spoken words or a diary page. It is my responsibility as a mother – by asking them to be open and honest about their struggles and feelings, pleading with them to find their own empathic voices in this world, recognising the *other* - to do that myself, as I ask them to do on a daily basis.

As a learner I think it is my responsibility to take forward the hopes of those who have supported me in my educational development:

> "I do not get to tell the end of my students' stories, only my own! I know now my hope for the future rests partly with the choices that Giulia is going to make for herself." (Laidlaw, 2018a, p. 49)

> "We are hoping that you will contribute with us in sustaining a critical and creative engagement within a living-culture-of-enquiry that is focused on personal/professional improvement to contribute to a global social movement that is focused on the flourishing of humanity." (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019, in press)

As a woman who loves and cares for others, I feel a responsibility towards making my personal knowledge visible, given that this personal knowledge is the outcome of encounters not only with disciplines but with people too. Some of these people have played a central role in my growing desire to find my own voice and have influenced me with their "knowledge of living experience" (Freire, 2014, p. 49). Such forms of knowing are far from being recognised by the Western academia (Wood *et al.*, 2019, p. 8). Within my limited means, this article represents a responsible gesture on my part to recognise the value that they, with their experiential knowledge, have played in the development of my self-enquiry. It is, therefore, an act of responsibility towards recognising *the other* as significant (Yamamoto, 1988).

This article is finally an act of responsibility for myself (Whitehead, 2014). The act of writing my own struggles, joys and fragilities is leading me to find my own space to exercise my personal freedom and beliefs (Greene, 1988). This is what I understand empowerment to be about: taking an aware responsibility for oneself. In trying to find the space to exercise my own freedom, I do not deny my personal responsibilities. On the contrary, I believe my freedom lies in a growing awareness of my conscious actions (Polanyi, 1927, in Thomasberg, 2003). I hope that, from this self-focused responsibility, others reading this article will find some resonance (Dadds, 2008) with their way of being, and that they will find the courage to abandon the enclosed, walled lives we live in and bring into the world their own honest voices.

I will now briefly introduce the definitions of both Development Management and Aesthetics which I refer to throughout the text. I believe this to be necessary as both disciplines have for me assumed an ontological dimension: contributing to bringing forward my understanding of what I care about and what I believe in and, hence, who I am (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019).

Definitions of Development Management and Aesthetics

Throughout this text when I refer to *Development Management* (DM) I make reference to Gulrajani's (2010) definition and vision of it: a practice "anchored in experiential realities", focused on "reducing the space between developers and those for whom development is sought" (p. 143). Gulrajani is calling for a recognition of DM as a "performance art" intended as "a sensitive and intuitive practice", which supports "experiential knowledge" carried out by "self-reflexive practitioners" who "constantly consider their problematic position within the development endeavour" (p. 144).

By *Aesthetics* in this text I do not refer to the "philosophy of art" (Guyer, 2018, p. 4), but to a philosophy of human responses, concerning "the contribution of sensory experience to knowledge" in general (Guyer, 2018, p. 5). Linked to the aesthetic dimension, which I have discovered to be a key aspect of my learning, is the decision to use a vast number of direct quotes from different authors in this article. I am aware that this might cause in the reader a feeling of a disjointed reading experience (J. Delong and G. Carozzi, personal communication, 28 May 2019). But the words of others have helped me come closer to understanding myself (Iser, 1972); they have become 'mine' in the sense that they are now part of who I am; they have become "living organisms" (Golden, 1986, p. 91) rooted in, and contributing to, my ontology. As "living organisms" (Golden, 1986, p. 91) they create an echo within myself that encourages me in trying to enact those words in my daily life.

Given these premises, in the following sections I give an account of my educational journey and development. I retrace the key phases that led me to the development of my Ph.D. proposal (Appendix) submitted to the University of Cumbria in chronological order; in the concluding section of this paper I briefly present my reactions to University of Cumbria's response to my proposal.

The first two years of the M.Sc. in Development Management

I started my M.Sc. in development management in 2015. At the time, due to my husband's work in international development, we lived in developing countries. I thought

that attending an online, distance learning, M.Sc. in Development Management (DM) with the Open University would help me to understand better the contexts in which we were living. I also felt the need to have something other than my children's education to focus on. I started my first module in November 2015 and shortly afterwards, we moved to Tanzania.

During the first two years, I engaged diligently with the materials I was given, not thinking very much about what I was doing (Arendt, 1958). I was driven towards articles and literature in which the personal experiences of the authors were made explicit. I recall in particular an extract from Freire (2014). I highlighted the second half of the text in which Freire (2014) recalls how a young man, worn out from hard labour, challenged his presentation on a child's moral code, "searing my [Freire's] soul for good and all" (Freire, 2014, p. 17).

> "As I followed his discourse, I began to see where he was going to go with it. I was slouching in my chair, slouching because I was trying to sink down into it. And the chair was swivelling, in the need of my imagination and the desire of my body, which were both in flight, to find some hole to hide in". (Freire, 2014, p. 18)

> "Now Doctor, look at the difference. You come home tired, sir, I know that. You may even have a headache from the work you do. Thinking; writing, reading, giving these kind of talks that you're giving now. That tires a person out too. But, sir," he continued, "it's one thing to come home, even tired, and find the kids all bathed, dressed up, clean, well fed, not hungry—and another thing to come home and find your kids dirty, hungry, crying, and making a noise. And people have to get up at four in the morning the next day and start all over again – hurting, sad, hopeless. If people hit their kids, and even 'go beyond bounds,' as you say, it's not because people don't love their kids. No, it's because life is so hard they don't have much choice. This is class knowledge, I say now." (Freire, 2014, p. 18).

I felt that the words of Freire (2014) were talking to me, not so much about international development but about a way of writing, a way of enquiring, a way of bringing personal experience and its uncomfortable aspects, into an academically rigorous text (Pinder, 2015). I didn't, however, question why this seemed to intrigue me. I simply enjoyed the text more than other writings which I considered sterile in their plain objectivity which didn't capture my attention. The extract from Freire (2014) touched and intrigued me, but it didn't occur to me that it wasn't just a matter of style that drew me towards such a text. I simply highlighted, without thinking that, if words touched me, then there might have been a reason. Only later in my studies was I able to recognise that "searing my soul for good and all" (Freire, 2014, p. 17), was becoming the basis for an ethical necessity of feeling moved by the encounter with others (Carozzi, 2018a). Back in 2015, I only perceived Freire's (2014) reading as an interesting, honest and genuine account of a personal experience.

At the time, I simply engaged with texts to extract information (Courtland *et al.*, 1998) in order to write my assignments diligently. I considered myself a student new to a subject area, who didn't have any relevant experience in the development sector and simply needed to learn in a passive way. I had "metaphysically removed myself from the world" (Magrini, 2011, p. 4) and learning was reduced to an acquisition of knowledge outside of my lived experience. I was far from considering the ontological implications that learning, as the educative process of being human in the world, might have had, which meant I didn't try to become "the interpreter of my world and the self" (Magrini, 2011, p. 3). It never occurred to

me that questioning the *whys* of my inclination towards Freire (2014) might have given me answers with regard to my personal way of being in the world, researching and enquiring. Freire's (2014) approach spoke to me but, in 2015, I could only highlight, leaving an empty, unresolved space between myself and the text.

A year went by, during which I had created strong relationships with local Tanzanian people. In particular two people, with whom I spent most of my days, became especially dear to me. One was Charles, the other was Pendo. Charles was a small, thin, man in his mid-fifties. He took care of our garden; he was always calm, never in a rush. He seemed to be able to appreciate every single hour of his day, whether it was arriving with his bicycle in the morning, sweeping leaves, stopping under a tree in the midday sun or getting ready to cycle home in the evening. Pendo was younger than Charles. She was in her early thirties when she started to help me with the house maintenance. She was a single mother of two girls. She was tall and strong. Her energy and combativeness, her way of walking down the hill at the end of the day with her straight shoulders; her positivity, despite the challenges she had to put up with on a daily basis, were for me new encounters.

I was drawn towards their knowledge embodied and rooted in their "living experiences" (Freire, 2014, p. 19). My fascination towards such knowledge was, I think, a form of "intuition as cognitive" experience (Reid 1976, p. 13); I was, "direct(ly) seeing and grasping" (Reid, 1981, p. 90). I was looking at Charles and Pendo, within a given atmosphere of which I was part of too. The mango trees, the smell of the tropical rain, the pink and purple buganvilia, were all contributing to that, "seeing and grasping" (Reid, 1981, p.90). In sitting with Pendo and Charles under the guava tree drinking the lemon grass chai that they always shared with me and the children, I experienced a feeling of being part of the world, being "deeply incorporated into it" (Weber, 2017, p. xiv). I felt that I was part of the reality I was living, of that atmosphere in which Pendo, Charles, the children and I were getting to know each other. I couldn't detach myself from such reality in order to analyse it (Weber, 2017).

 In my attraction towards people's lived knowledge there was, "little analytic discrimination or linguistic articulation of the parts or aspects" (Reid, 1976, p. 12). There was a, "feeling of, for, or after rather than ratiocinate affirmations, analytic or synthetic" (Reid, 1976, p. 12). I was experiencing the power of the, "immediately apprehended" (Reid, 1980, p. 331); but I wasn't able to recognise such experiences as living forms of knowledge (Reid, 1980). At the time, it was a tacit and ineffable knowledge that I was not able to articulate (Polanyi, 1962). It didn't occur to me either that I might need to ask myself the meaning of my cognitive experiences, the meaning behind my, "feeling for" (Reid, 1976 p. 12; Mowles, 2010). Neither had I made the connection with Freire's (2014) extract, which I had highlighted only a few months earlier. I was still far from considering the potential of literature, "as an exploration of my own values, social concerns" (Fillion, 1981, p. 39) and a means by which to understand my own lived experiences.

Towards the end of my third module (Institutional Development), I started, slowly and tentatively, to ask myself questions:

- Could some of the issues that I had found in the module materials be relevant to my own lived experiences, to myself?

- Could I be considered a subject of development and not a bringer of development?

I was slowly abandoning a vision of the text, of learning in fact, as a, "static entity" (Golden, 1986, p. 91) and starting to perceive it as a "living organism" (Golden, 1986, p. 91) enhancing the articulation of my, "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 96). While I was formulating confusing questions about my position within the subject area I was studying, we were in the process of leaving Mwanza (Tanzania), a place that I loved, and saying goodbye to the people I loved.

Just before leaving Tanzania I submitted an end-of-module assignment on female genital mutilation (FGM) as an informal institution. Throughout the module my attention was caught by informal institutions: "usually (un-written) norms, customary practices, standard operating procedures, routines, conventions and traditions" (Leftwich and Sen, 2011 p. 322). The more I looked at this definition, the more I kept thinking that informal institutions, expressed especially through the power of "routines and conventions" (Leftwich and Sen, 2011, p. 322), were something that had always been present in my own life. I started to feel the "coming together of a particular personality with a particular text at a particular time and place, under particular circumstances" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 104). My 'I' made its first appearance in the final assignment of my third module:

> "What became clearer in these few weeks is that FGM is not only a matter of "saving the girls" but a much more complex phenomenon that needs a deep understanding of its meanings and its power dynamics. Reading the reports and especially the article by Shell-Duncan (2008) helped me gaining a broader perspective on the subject; often I tried to put myself in the position of a mother living in the Mara region. If FGM was part of my culture, if I didn't have any education, if I knew this was for her the only way to marry someone and hence not to starve, if my mother had done it to me, if the elders in the village had strongly recommended it, if the gods had given signs for it… I might have been among those 14.6% [subject to FGM]." (Carozzi, 2017a, p. 9).

Although it wasn't a grounded, clarified *I*, embedded in the last few lines of my assignment, what is there, however blurred, is the desire for understanding the lives of others through empathy (Dadds, 2008) rooted in what was a still-forming belief that people must be seen (Yamamoto, 1988) and respected in the sacredness of their lives (Satir, 2013). I was influenced by the contextual life and experiences I was facing in leaving Tanzania. I didn't however have the courage and clarity to say:

- I am/was myself under severe pressure from informal institutions; how can I work in development management one day if I haven't clarified the informal institutions that oppress/ed me?

This kind of question became stronger and clearer in my fourth module (Development: Context and Practice). In one assignment, writing about gender inequalities grounded in socio-cultural norms (Rao and Walton, 2004), I looked at the importance of gender empowerment (Reeves and Baden, 2000). I started to perceive a growing difficulty in my studies related to the fact that I was writing assignments as if I knew what the key to empowerment was, as if I could consider myself an 'empowered woman'. Slowly a new question started to emerge:

- How can I write about empowerment, if I do not know myself what it is?

A growing sense of, 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989) started to make its way into my life, in the way I was enquiring but, as before, I felt it without being able to articulate it. I was slowly, without realising it, becoming the subject of my own studies (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019).

The last year of the M.Sc. – meeting Prof. Moira Laidlaw and writing the dissertation

It was only in the final year of my M.Sc. that I started the process of bringing myself into my own studies and writings (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019), to the extent that was allowed in an M.Sc., to become the more conscious subject of my own studies (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). Two factors enhanced this process.

In October 2017, Prof. Moira Laidlaw introduced herself as a tutor to her new group of students in the foundation module Capacities for Managing Development. Although I had got on well with all the tutors in the previous modules, I felt something special and different in the relationship that Moira and I established: it was grounded not only in a "compatible working style" but also in what we discovered with time to be "similar values" (Laidlaw, 2018a, p. 43).

Moira replied quickly to emails, she encouraged us as students to form questions, and required us to be clear in our writings. By being clear and precise in our assignments she asked us to be clear about ourselves, interrogating and making explicit what, for me, could only be described as the source of my thinking, as well as clarify the angle I was writing from (Laidlaw, 2017). She introduced me to the world of values intended as explanatory principles of the meanings of what I was writing (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). She guided me towards a more disciplined discovery and clarification of the personal: "Your task is to show what values and what biases your own text might have", considering this as a key aspect of academic rigour (Laidlaw, 2017).

Moira's patience and warmth in welcoming my emails, queries and reflection gave me a growing strength, the strength of actually trying to write assignments in an academically rigorous way and in the first person: I felt that the first person, my own *I*, was seen (Yamamoto, 1988) and valued.

> "You earned every single percent, Giulia. You always do. You earned this with your work over Week 13 and since. And you earned it with the work in Part One. I would also suggest you earned this throughout your life to date." (M. Laidlaw and G. Carozzi, personal communication, 7 February 2018)

Meanwhile my passion for the personal and the subjective was slowly taking shape and, while this was happening, the distance between myself and the inspirational readings I was engaging with was reducing. I had Moira encouraging me in rigorously, "taking increasingly responsibility for my own learning (…) and learning for my own existence in the world of others" (Laidlaw, 2018a, p. 31). This increasingly-felt responsibility was also supported by texts, which gave me the impression that there was a way of conceiving research and approaching reality that, "satisfied the human being in me" (Laidlaw, 2004, p.

3). I was, however, still distant in terms of clarifying to myself and to the readers who and what that "human being in me" comprised.

Among all the texts that were for me sources of inspiration, there was Abbott's (2007) personal account of her Ph.D. field research in Mumbai. She highlighted the importance of establishing meaningful relationships, based on shared identities, with the female meal-makers, the topic of her research (Abbott, 2007). For me, she was an example of the possibility of researching starting from an awareness of the subjective and the personal.

> "This chapter argues that, rather than seeking out proofs that fit in with 'traditional' notions of research, we reflect on the processes that have shaped our understanding of particular situations and context. This especially includes the subjective, value-laden and personal interpretations that have enabled us to build relationships and, in turn, widen our understanding of their specific situations." (Abbott, 2007, p. 209)

In Abbott's words, I recognised aspects of my personal experiences. Through Moira's gentle determination in asking for, "an awareness of one's own way of thinking" (Laidlaw, 2018a, p. 38) I started to find the strength to bring forward what I believed people working in development management might need to reflect upon into one assignment.

> "In this process of reflection, the 'self' of the evaluator has to be made open and clear; the evaluator becomes a self-reflective practitioner. From this self-reflection a knowing better can arise (Chambers, 2017): empathy, honesty and subjectivity can actually lead development practitioners to have stronger insights on this world's complexities. Working with the personal and the subjective means abandoning discourses that measure development and starting, instead, to feel it." (Carozzi, 2017b, p. 4)

My point of view and beliefs were grounded in my own experiences. I had a problem with those experiences, however: they were not only entirely subjective but also something that had happened to me in my own domestic setting, outside a formal development management role. Because I didn't have a formally identifiable role, other than being a white woman, a wife and a mother looking after her own children, I didn't feel entitled to ground my opinion in my own lived experiences. In the lines above there is still a gap between the fascination for the personal and the subjective, a generic 'self' and the unquestioned reasons behind my fascination. Through an increasingly growing dialectical relationship (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) with Moira Laidlaw I was able to overcome partially such a gap: this happened through writing my dissertation.

Having completed my foundation module, I started to work on my dissertation. Initially I intended to work on "managing the self in development management" (Laidlaw, 2018a, p. 43). Again, a generic 'self' was my compromise between writing about the importance of the subjective and personal stances in DM whilst keeping my clarified and informed self out of the research itself. I didn't, at the time see the immense contradiction – a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) – that I was facing.

> "Giulia: I am so totally intrigued about looking in to the role played by the self in carrying out research for development, based on the fact that a thing like doing impartial research doesn't exist.

Moira: The problem with this as it stands, is that it is a theoretical self, which, by definition, doesn't exist. To find any kind of evidence to make claims based on a theoretical human being, just isn't tenable. HOWEVER – and why I think this has promise – you might take the path of action research – see the url by Jean McNiff on Action Research – she's a world leader – as a tenable methodology for this module." (G. Carozzi and M. Laidlaw, personal communication, 4 May 2018)

It was very difficult for me to understand what Moira was writing about. My impression, grounded in her EJOLTS article (Laidlaw, 2018a), is that she tried to give me suggestions that I would need to explore in my own space and time. It was in such a space and time, in which I felt, "recognised and appreciated by a significant other" (Yamamoto, 1988, p. 184), that I tried to take increasing responsibility for my own learning, coming to terms with my own contradictions and finding an empowering pleasure in new discoveries.

"I realise that throughout the module I pushed her hard in terms of her ability to make academically valid claims to know something, precision with language and ideation, and the forms in which the claims she made could most likely flourish. Managing this, without cramping her style or crushing her spirit has been, for me, a balancing act throughout this presentation." (Laidlaw, 2018a, p. 44)

I started to shift the subject of my dissertation. While I was abandoning the idea of a *generic self*, I began to consider the importance that empathy might have in DM, based on making explicit the values that informed my decision (Chambers, 2017): love, respect and curiosity. I was still very much struggling with my own vision and ideas, and while I felt I had something worthwhile to say, there was, for the best part of the final module, a difficulty on my part in articulating the essence of this 'worthwhileness' and I knew that empathy alone was not enough. In the following videos, I hope it is possible to perceive a sense of the difficulties I faced in narrowing down what I wanted to research in my dissertation and the almost ontological struggle to define what I believed in.

https://youtu.be/1j4uzZk-5OE?list=PLLC9RbZ6qMR1tl-KRpx1f4dcNtST2id2C&t=6

(Moira and Giulia: 5 June 2018 first three minutes of the conversation)

https://youtu.be/f3YqDtS3i4c?t=4341 (Moira and Giulia: 18 June 2018 from 1:12:22 to 1:15:34)

The necessity of being moved in development management became the title of my dissertation. In it, I explored the centrality of relationships between human beings, enhanced by empathy, as a means to epistemological and ontological growth (Carozzi, 2018a). I was finally able to understand why the extract from Freire (2014) had caught my attention three years earlier; I could now see why I felt so touched by it. It wasn't simply a matter of style, neither was it just a fascination for his personal account. He described the ethical necessity to recognise how knowledge is affected by human encounters, by being moved by the lives of others. In it, I recognised an ethical urgency, which was the source of my dissertation.

'Necessity' is used here, acknowledging its strong meaning: it implies something urgent, indispensable (Collins English Dictionary, 2000). This urgency, informed heavily by my personal experiences and values (love, respect and curiosity), was originated by a feeling of outrage (Pinder, 2018) towards managerialistic approaches applied to DM, in which

efficiency and impartiality replace "civic virtues, moral purposes and public service sentiment" (Gularajani, 2011, p. 205). (Carozzi, 2018a, p. 6)

> (…) "it is possible to carry out a practice in which development managers might make use of their own inherently human resources rather than resorting to principles borrowed from business logic (Gulrajani, 2011). Being moved towards the other and by the other is stressed here to be of fundamental, urgent and necessary importance to affirm a development practice as a "shared responsibility" towards better "human possibilities", in which "the self and the other are brought together" (Quarles Van Ufford and Giri, 2003, p. 253-4). In that movement, the potentials of practitioners' humanity are enclosed; this might lead to "knowing better for doing better" (Chambers, 2017, p. 150)." (Carozzi, 2018a, p. 10)

What I was researching and writing was grounded in my own experience, yet that personal experience – which I started to consider not only as a beautiful memory but a part of my own knowledge (Harding, 1992) – could not be presented in my M.Sc. dissertation. I had to bring in qualitative data, through interviews of development practitioners, in order to make my point valid (The Open University, 2009). I started to perceive a growing sense of discomfort with some literature I was asked to engage with. I felt so particularly in reading a chapter dedicated to participatory methods aimed at women's empowerment (Mayoux and Johnson, 2007). In it I perceived a negation for the singularity of human beings in the way their knowledge was represented in text as a naked example of lack of awareness.

https://youtu.be/0haCL3K85Bk?list=PLLC9RbZ6qMR1tl-KRpx1f4dcNtST2id2C&t=1220

(Moira and Giulia: 6 September 2018 from 20:20 to 22:10)

Meanwhile, the concept of *living contradiction* (Whitehead, 1986) was becoming for me a living reality in my research, especially in designing the methodology section, where I was facing ethical difficulties in making decisions with regard to whom to interview or not. The following extract from a diary represents for me a key point: aspects of Living Theory research were slowly making their way not only into my research but in the way I was living and experiencing my enquiry.

> "I am very concerned about the small number of people I will be gathering data from. Four people are a very small amount. Originally, I thought to interview migrants and street people but after talking to P. I really don't feel like 'robbing' them of their stories. If I interview them, I would go totally against the principles, the values that are at the origin of this research. I would be facing a very strong living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989). I am not sure whether it would be possible, but I could use living contradiction perhaps as a 'tool' to justify my decision, even introducing it with in the set of research questions.

> "However, not having the voices of the last" (Chambers, 1983), could be another massive living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989). It would result in not considering them as subject but as object, object in a narrative made by the development managers, the powerful subject. How would the data collected on "reciprocities" (Chambers, 2017) be of any validity if I interview only half of that reciprocity?" (Carozzi, 2018b, Data Archive)

It was only in the final month of the module, however, that I felt all the conversations with Moira, the readings she had suggested mainly by Buber (1947), Yamamoto (1988) and Whitehead (2018, 2015, 2012, 1989) had started to make sense and transcended the

separation that throughout my life as a student I perceived between myself and the texts I was reading. Such a distance was slowly to be made less huge by giving my own living meanings to the words of others through my own writing, through experiencing in a living dimension my dissertation. It was a *realization:* "the text takes on life when it is realized (…). The convergence between the text and the reader brings the literary work into existence" (Iser, 1972, p. 279). A feeling of growing responsibility was the motor that let that distance come shorter. I felt a responsibility *for* myself (Whitehead, 2014) in recognising the relevance that my own educational influences and personal values had played in the development of my "personal knowledge" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 344) represented by the dissertation. And while that responsibility was becoming a growing awareness, a *narrative about Giulia* was disclosing itself in my final work as shown in the following three-minute videoed conversation.

https://youtu.be/0haCL3K85Bk?list=PLLC9RbZ6qMR1tl-KRpx1f4dcNtST2id2C&t=2040
(Moira and Giulia: 6 September 2018 from 34:01 to 37:01)

My dissertation was my very first attempt to express, albeit indirectly, what had so much touched me in my experience in Tanzania and elsewhere in the world**,** and to embrace the complexities of research explicitly as living contradictions, making those a means for ethical concerns and contextual validity (Carozzi, 2018a). In doing so, I perceived a difficulty in respecting the parameters that I was given by the OU in terms of how to structure my final work and what in it could count as a "piece of academic informed consultancy research" (The Open University, 2009, p. 8). I was slowly becoming aware of the power that the social formation in which I was operating, the OU, had over me (Whitehead, 2018). I can't claim that my dissertation influenced the social formation in which I was operating, but I know that the process of writing it, was for me *liberating*, as I say in the above video to Moira. As a mother, I felt I was recognised and acknowledged in my efforts of writing the dissertation by a drawing of my, at the time, five-year-old son.

Image 1. Aidan's drawing

"I came back home exhausted, having finally almost completed my dissertation. In the past weeks I have read some parts of it to Aidan as Moira suggested. I didn't realise how much he had understood of what I have been doing until today. He ran towards me whilst I was on the door with a drawing saying: "This is for you, this is what you are doing, isn't it?". His enthusiasm and love were overwhelming, but only in looking at the picture I realised that what I had been working on for months had a significance, that went beyond a 'pass' or a 'fail'. I felt my efforts were validated by him. When I asked Aidan what the drawing

represented he said: "two people are united by a rope that doesn't exist but there is". He has represented what is taking me 10.000 words to say." (Carozzi, 2018b, Personal Data archive)

Despite Aidan's recognition, and validation, trying to find ways to both follow what I was asked to do but also listening to myself was often a painful struggle in which I perceived the difficulties of facing and recognising the power of the social formation within which I was operating; the outcome of such a struggle in which I tried to listen to myself, was one of the first steps towards a *discovery of myself.*

"Overall by having clarified my personal lens, my *I*, as the parameter for an ethical and moral investigation, I've also tried to use my *I* as the maker of this research contextual validity. In order to avoid living contradictions (Whitehead, 2012), the values of respect, love and equality led my research." (Carozzi, 2018a, p. 20)

However, only in the acknowledgments was I able to openly give voice to the power of my own personal relationships, which inspired my dissertation, led to it and enabled it. It is in those acknowledgments the genuine root of what, then, I started to consider as the aware educational influences grounded in my conscious lived experiences (Whitehead, 2009).

"I thank Prof. Moira Laidlaw [who] has been following with immense patience and care my educational development. She has enabled not only my learning but also my growth as an individual. She has helped me to "see what is yet to be seen" (Yamamoto, 1988, p. 186), striking a balance between accompanying me in my personal exploration (Chambers, 2014, p. 130) and leaving me space in such a travel."

"Finally, from the bottom of my heart, I am eternally in debt to Charles and Pendo. In the year and half spent with them in Mwanza (Tanzania); they showed me the immense possibilities of "universal reciprocities" based on small, daily gestures. I want to thank particularly Pendo who accompanied me, through memories, in this project. Without her, this dissertation wouldn't have existed: she gave concrete meanings to the even most abstract concepts. She is the essence of this dissertation and this work is for her." (Carozzi, 2018a, p. 4)

By considering some aspects of my lived experiences as educational influences, I started to reflect on how much love, respect and curiosity were fundamental in giving meaning to those episodes. I began to think that I could consider my values as explanatory principles in the explanation of such influences (Whitehead, 2009). I was slowly starting to make plans for carrying on my studies after the M.Sc.

I submitted my dissertation with the belief that, by having expressed my values and my living contradictions, my "personal lens had been clarified" (Carozzi, 2018a, p. 20). Nevertheless, within ten days of my submission, I was feeling restless. I started to think that the acknowledgments written in my dissertation didn't shed enough light on the people that enhanced my living understanding of universal reciprocities (Chambers,2017), I felt that their "knowledge of living experience" (Freire, 2014, p. 49) and its influence on me should have been made far more explicit. In a diary I re-wrote the acknowledgments.

"Finally, from the bottom of my heart, I am eternally in debt to Charles and Pendo. In the year and half spent with them in Mwanza (Tanzania), they showed me the immense possibilities of "universal reciprocities" based on small, daily gestures. I want to thank particularly Pendo for the hours we spent together, during which she made me understand that it is possible to peel potatoes and clean fish while smiling: she taught me to give a loving meaning to gestures made for and directed to others. I am grateful for the way she has been with my children, offering them the opportunity to encounter the mother I am not: as a solid blooming tree she gave them security, protection and unquestioned joy. I thank Charles, because he was for me the embodiment of frugality towards himself and generosity towards others. Despite his poverty, represented by his torn shirts, he waited each day at the gate for Aidan (my son) to come back from school holding in his hand a vitumbua (a traditional Tanzanian cake). Early in the morning, before arriving to our house, he always went to the market to buy a vitumbua for Aidan using his own savings and offered it to him after school, having carefully wrapped it up in a newspaper sheet. Pendo and Charles have contributed not only to my own educational growth but also showed to my children the possibilities of a sentimental education in which "in the beginning is relation" (Buber, 1971 in Yaron, 1993, p. 135)." (Carozzi, 2018b, Personal Data archive)

Despite Moira saying that in my final work there was a, "powerful narrative about Giulia" (Laidlaw, 2018b) I felt I wanted to engage more thoroughly in that narrative. In order to do so, I had to answer a question at the heart of Living Theory research, which I had been carefully avoiding: "How can I improve my practice?" (Whitehead, 2018, p .1). Within that question, there was something for me terrifying, which was the word *practice*. I had first to clarify it in order to move my enquiry forward.

"Almost whatever I have done in my life so far has been an act of "spontaneous irresponsibility": I never place too much thoughts in things... I let occasions lead me without too much care. I always had strong passions, but I didn't try to forge them in anything other... You could say, I suppose, that I have never been too serious... This last year for me has been a "revelation" and you have started a process which, I think, might take my passions a bit further... But I do not know (yet) how to go about it..." (Carozzi G., Laildlaw, M. and Whitehead, J., personal communication, 24 October 2018)

Writing my Ph.D. proposal

A telephone call with Jack Whitehead and Moira Laidlaw followed the email of the 24th October that wasn't recorded. It was a difficult conversation in which Jack suggested that I engage with the question, "how can I improve my practice?" and clarify what my practice was. For me it stands as one of the most important examples of the relevance of dialectic relationships, "as the process through which one's understanding is transformed as one engages in the struggle to represent what one means" (Whitehead, 2018), which is linked to an "openness about purposeful self-knowledge" (Whitehead, 2018). Later it also became clearer to me that the phone-call with Jack and Moira, which became the starting point for a more aware self-enquiry, counted and still counts for me as a living example of "educational conversations as a research method" (Delong, 2019, p. 1) in which learning happens "within a relationship" (Delong, 2019, p.1).

I knew Moira well and I had known Jack for a few months. I knew their questions were grounded in "values of freedom, justice, compassion, respect for persons, love and democracy lived as fully as possible" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 107). This meant that I didn't feel

judged from the top-down (Chambers, 2014), I had been asked a question coming from a genuine, loving and caring curiosity towards the life of the other (Whitehead, 2011).

Clarifying what was and is my practice found me in an emotionally difficult place. During the writing of the dissertation, I often complained about feeling restricted in my research, but this had actually provided a powerful excuse to avoid engaging with the question of *practice*. The ontological pain, which I felt after the phone call with Jack and Moira, the feeling of total disorientation, needed to be listened to, recognised and explored in their *whyness* rooted in my *being* (Jung, 2016). I saw the disclosure and clarification of that pain as a necessary means to take forward the *narrative about Giulia*, to ground my epistemology in my ontology:

> "Whatever it is that puts me in this "mist", whatever this mist is, I think I should face it in order to go through it, overcome it... I suppose that if I won't, this would be a rather big living contradiction." (G. Carozzi, Laidlaw, M. personal communication, 25 October 2018)

The following months were a struggle for me to understand myself, to research not a generic self anymore, but my own self (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). For me, the question regarding my own practice was a question of self-definition and self-identification; it was about "individualisation as coming to 'selfhood' or 'self-realization'", moving towards a clarification "of the collective qualities of the human being" (Jung, 1962, pp. 266-267). It was therefore a deeply ontological matter through which the questions around a clarification of my *I*, led me to the process of researching them (Whitehead, 2018). My self-enquiry was taking shape.

I had to face the questions that had emerged during my years of M.Sc. study concerning empowerment (Reeves and Baden, 2000), and socio-cultural norms (Rao and Walton, 2004). Within a Living Theory research approach, those questions were linked on the one hand to the concept of taking responsibility *for* myself (Whitehead, 2014) in trying to live my own life in the most authentic way possible, finding my own voice; and on the other, in seeing how socio-historical and socio-cultural influences had contributed or restricted my way of being (Whitehead, 2018). In the following video, I hope it is possible to discern, on the one hand, how suddenly abstract concepts became for me living dimensions contributing to the emergence of a "self-realization" (Jung, 1962, p. 266) and on the other, the embodied and ontological difficulty in relating words as *dependency* and *self-definition* to my own being.

https://youtu.be/-g1emqdyBas?list=PLLC9RbZ6qMR1tl-KRpx1f4dcNtST2id2C&t=1248

(Giulia and Moira 27 February 2019. 20:48 to 24:00)

There was another fundamental aspect that emerged over the months, and that was related to Moira's Ph.D. research in Living Theory research (Laidlaw, 1996). For me reading Moira's Ph.D. was a fundamental step in my enquiry towards understanding the role of the aesthetic dimension in my learning. It was a crucial point in my learning and process of self-awareness. Throughout her Ph.D, she used the poem by Coleridge "The Ancient Mariner" as "her own living philosophy" (Laidlaw, 1996, p. 16): not as a distant piece of "literature to be analysed on the basis of objective literature understandings", but as an ontological means, "a metaphorical means" (Laidlaw, 1996, p. 10) to enhance the disclosure of an educational

knowledge intended as a "tale of suffering and joy, of despair and hope" (Laidlaw, 1996, p. 57). "The Ancient Mariner" was the "true-to-life" dimension throughout her research (Iser, 1972, p. 293); she used it as a means for "identification, as the establishment of affinities" between herself and something external, the text (Iser, 1972, p. 296). By doing so, she broke the distance between herself and Coleridge's poem, bringing "The Ancient Mariner" in "to full existence" (Iser, 1972, p. 297) through its use as a living dimension for "uncovering her own ethics and ontology" (Laidlaw, 1996, p. 39).

What inspired me in Moira's Ph.D. thesis (Laidlaw, 1996) was how she made the subjective and ontological interaction between herself and the text explicit. The poem is a guide towards a deeper understanding of herself, and in Coleridge's verses she found herself (Laidlaw, 1996).

This was something I felt slowly happening throughout my M.Sc. and, after having submitted my dissertation and read Moira's Ph.D. (Laidlaw, 1996), I was able finally to articulate. I was slowly abandoning "the efferent stance" in which the reader (I) is engaged with the text "to extract information" (Courtland *et al.,* 1998, p. 331) in favour of an "aesthetic dimension" in which the text was becoming a means to "autobiographical and intertextual associations" within the context in which the text is read (Wiseman, 1992, in Courtland *et al.*, 1998, p. 331). While I was engaging in the reading of Green's "Dialectic of Freedom" (1998), I realised how much I desired to find and create the space for my human freedoms in the life I lived. This could happen only through the "power of reflection" applied to "naming the obstacles that impede" (Greene, 1988, p. 5) the disclosure in my daily life of my *being* (Magrini, 2011).

I slowly started to develop my Ph.D. proposal (see [Appendix](#)). Naming the obstacles (Greene, 1988) for me meant that I had to go through a process of re-enaction (Arendt, 1958) through which I would recall the episodes in which I perceived my own *I* being disclosed or negated "with in a web of human relationships" (Arendt, 1958, p. 158). I realised that, through engaging in the aesthetic dimensions of reading and in dialectic relationships, I might come to a better understanding of myself (Courtland, 1998). Through the exploration of my own values, I suggested in the proposal, I might be able to understand what were/are the meanings and purposes of my existence (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019).

> "Through the development of my own educational knowledge I hope to become the self-aware knower of the sociohistorical and sociocultural dynamics and influences that shaped what I have known and what I have done, thus, who I am (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019)." (Carozzi, 2019, p. 2)

In my Ph.D. proposal ([Appendix](#)) I expressed the wish to make my own enquired and clarified *I* visible, through the responsible and hopeful decision to understand the world from my own point of view (Polanyi, 1962), the point of view of an authentic learner (Magrini, 2011), in a way that could contribute to the flourishing of my own humanity and the humanity of others (Whitehead, 2018) by stressing the importance of human connectedness. I see the values of hope and responsibility central in the production of my own educational knowledge.

This is where, at present, the encounter with Living Theory research has led me to: the courage to make my own *I* the text and subject of my own personal enquiry, to make

visible the invisible (Sumara, 1995). By engaging in my self-enquiry as an authentic learner, by questioning what is my practice, by stressing the importance of dialectic relationships and embracing the aesthetic dimension of the texts I will be reading, I hope to get closer to what Iser (1972) defines as:

> "the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. These are the ways in which reading literature gives us the chance to formulate the unformulated." (Iser, 1972, p. 299)

Conclusions

While I was finishing this article, I received a letter from the University of Cumbria stating that my Ph.D. proposal had not been accepted. This happened three days before my thirty-first birthday. It wasn't pleasant news to receive but nevertheless, the process of enquiry has started and cannot now be deflected. My self-enquiry has become my own living dimension (Whitehead, 2018): a personal quest towards my own human way of being in the world with others (Magrini, 2011). It is my personal space in which and through which I try to find my own human freedom through the power of reflection (Greene, 1988). It is an ongoing self-questioning and self-individualising process in which I try to link actions, words, meanings and thoughts. It is a "way of life" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 7) which goes beyond the practicalities associated with "starting a research officially" (J. Delong and G. Carozzi, personal communication, April 22, 2019). The Ph.D. proposal sent to Cumbria was an interim attempt to clarify, to myself in the first instance, in which direction I was trying to go. I do see it as an expression of a struggle that needed to be made more comprehensible to the outside world, needed to be less abstract, and needed to be, yet again, more courageous about *who* the *I* in question is/was, and its position within a real world shared with other real human beings.

However, I do recognise that my proposal has become a guide that enhances an understanding of my children's struggles and difficulties in finding their own way of being in the world with others. The difficulties they face are similar to the ones I am living through. My enquiry and this article have become tangible means through which I try to show them that our quests are not far apart, that I am trying to make public my desire to understand and to find my own voice as well, as I ask them to do in their social world, whether it is at school or at the park.

> "Aidan has come back from school upset. "Today at school I wanted to build a farm with wooden blocks, but other children joined in and said a farm wasn't needed as it was important, instead, to build a pond in which to keep Donald Scrooge's money. I said to them we could build both but then they destroyed the farm I was building. I got very angry and I felt I was caught in a wall, maybe a net". He showed me with his little hands the shape of the net. "I am upset because of two things: I wanted to build the farm and I couldn't; I wanted to punch them and got angry and I know I should not do this. But you, see mamma, I try to cross the angry net and I get stuck in it". I had to think what to answer him. The following day in the car I explained to him: "Aidan, I think I can understand. You want to build a farm, and the others want you to join in building a pond. I am too building a farm, it is called a proposal, it is what I do when you see me writing at the computer. The proposal, or farm, is what I care about, what I want to do but I often have the feeling that other people would like

me instead to build a pond, which in my case would be studying things I do not care a lot about. I sometimes get angry, and I am also caught in the net as you do… but I have found out that the best thing is try to explain why the farm matters so much to you, if others do not know your reasons they will not see why you want that farm so much. But it is also important to understand why the others want to build a pond. Did you ask it? I often forget to do so and it isn't good. Try to talk, Aidan, and you might find the net suddenly disappears and if you talk and still there is no space for the farm that matters so much to you, and you are still not interested in the pond, well… collect your blocks and move a bit and keep building the farm if it is so important for you. Do you see, I think we are doing the same!". He smiled and joyfully said: "Isn't it wonderful that we both are building a farm!?" (Carozzi, 2018b, personal data archive).

If the words of Tolstoy (1869) for me have more than an efferent stance, but an aesthetic dimension (Rosenblatt, 1985), if my educational journey has got an ontological meaning in the life I live and it is linked with both hope and responsibility, my research, then, ought not to end:

"No, life is not over at thirty-one!" Prince Andrew suddenly decided finally and decisively. "It is not enough for me to know what I have in me – everyone must know it: Pierre, and that young girl who wanted to fly away into the sky, everyone must know me, so that my life may not be lived for myself alone while others live so apart from it, but so that it may be reflected in them all, and they and I may live in harmony!" (Tolstoy, 1869, p. 452)

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Appendix

Giulia Carozzi's Ph.D. proposal, submitted to the University of Cumbria in spring 2019.

Working title of the topic area

Towards a self-study: developing my educational knowledge as a matter of personal and responsible freedoms.

General overview of the area

My research aims at being a self-enquiry based on the development of an emergent educational knowledge. It will be an account of a human being, a mother, a woman, a researcher, striving to perceive herself as the authentic "author of", and actor in, "her own world" (Greene, 1988, p. 22).

The foundation of my research is the yearning to be loyal to my ontological quest intended as the clarification and disclosure in practice of my inner and developmental *being* (Magrini, 2011). This desire is rooted in the struggle to perceive a coherence between my *inner being*, united and developmental (Magrini, 2011), and its disclosure in my daily actions; I am accompanied by a sense of fragmentation and dissonance between the former and the latter. I recognise the paradox (Schad, 2017) of considering my *inner being* united and developmental, but this allows me to look at the uniqueness of my *being*, seeing it as developmental: a *being*-in the world with others (Magrini, 2011).

Questions of the kind, "what holds my inner and acting/relational-I together?" and "what is at the base of this fragmentation?" require me to look at my actions as "manifestation of the agent" (Arendt, 1958, p. 187). By "re-enacting" (Arendt, 1958, p. 187) certain episodes of my life, I intend to unveil the meanings behind them and see my own *I* disclosing itself or being negated within "a web of human relationships" (Arendt, 1958, p. 184).

My research will search for the wellspring that holds together an *inner I* in its abstract form and an *I* in-action in the world with others. In this enquiry, values will play a central role: I see them as "intimately related to our theory of being, to who we are, to why are we doing what we are doing" (Whitehead, 2011), and to my "vision of reality" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 159). They are associated with the desire "to give meaning and purpose" to my life (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019, n. p.) living it with authenticity. By authenticity, I understand the ontological awakening towards a deep appreciation of what being alive in the world with others means. The following extract shaped my understanding of authenticity as the urgency for an ontological awakening and disclosure (Laidlaw, 1996; Fillion, 1981).

> "It is not enough for me to know what I have in me. Everyone must know it (…), everyone must know me so that my life may not be lived for myself alone while others live so apart from it, but so that it may be reflected in them all, and they and I may live in harmony!" (Tolstoy, 1869, p. 452)

I believe hope and responsibility to be the core values that shape my *inner I;* they provide the perimeter of my own dynamic ontology. I see, however, love, respect and

curiosity (Carozzi, 2018) as means-values to reach hope and responsibility, but also flourishing outcomes of my two core values. I seek to understand if and how hope and responsibility contribute to my sense of wholeness and authenticity when put into practice. I try to make myself accountable to those values, yet I recognise that, as my *inner I* is developmental so are my values and the meanings associated with them. I intend to consider, then, hope and responsibility (together with love, respect and curiosity) in their relationally-dynamic forms (Laidlaw, 2018), not as static standard of judgments but themselves developmental as I am (Laidlaw, 1996). I also plan to consider them as explanatory principles in the exploration of the meanings of my specific actions (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019).

My living and relational identities seem to tear apart my sense of wholeness. The gap between my *inner I* and my *relational being*, is a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) from which doubts about *who* I really am arise. My struggle towards the "enduring coming to self-hood" (Magrini, 2011, p. 5) has to be reached in a dialectic presence with others who reveal their uniqueness in living relationships as I do. The wellspring of my being needs to be disclosed in a living form (Lajul, 2013).

It is from my value-knowledge (Reid, 1980) intended as those episodes in which I felt a "knowing with a kind of total involvement" (Reid, 1980, p. 335) that I will start my research. I see the recollections of moments in which I perceived a value-knowledge, as a means to develop an educational knowledge that transcends the *hic et nunc* to which value-knowledge is associated (Reid, 1980). In developing my educational knowledge, starting from enquiring into my *being*, I wish to move from "an embodied tacit knowledge" (McNiff and Whithead, 2006, p. 87) to an awareness of my *I,* "evolving (an) understanding of the self that is relational and dynamic" (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019, n. p.). Through this process, I hope to become the self-aware knower of the sociohistorical and sociocultural dynamics and influences that shaped what I have known and what I have done, thus, who I am (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). It is therefore educational because it helps me clarify who I am.

The development of my own educational knowledge will be a way to "understand the world from my point of view" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 344), to express my own personal and human freedom identified with "the power of reflection and with the self-modifying power of thought" (Hampshire, 1975 in Greene, 1988, p. 4). By considering being human as the capacity to be an "authentic learner" (Magrini, 2011, p. 1), I intend to develop my educational knowledge as the disclosure of my own ontology, the "unfolding of the educative process of interpreting and discoursing about the world, that is learning about the world, selves and the others" (Magrini, 2011 p. 3). In doing so, I recognise the role that others have in my own development. I therefore apply my own "social freedom" (Polanyi, 1927 in Thomasberg, 2003, p. 1) as the choice of embracing my own, personal responsibility in this world, towards the generation of a knowledge that highlights the importance of connectedness among human beings (Thomasberg, 2003).

By trying to overcome my feeling of fragmentation, I embrace my own personal responsibility to live my ontological values more fully and consciously. I recognize that the development of my educational knowledge is a way of knowing better myself: it is an act of personal responsibility *for* myself (Whitehead, 2014). This might contribute to the flourishing of my own humanity (Whitehead, 2018): the process of learning is a dynamic process (Whitehead, 2009) of self-developing (Magrini, 2011); it is a pursuit towards new dimensions

of being in the world with others (Huxtable, 2009). This is my personal contribution as a citizen of the world with "a duty to reach beyond" (Greene, 1988, p. 3).

I also see the development of my educational knowledge as an act of personal responsibility with "universal intent" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 344). The act of knowing and my intellectual commitment to it are connected with a sense of "hope" and responsible "obligation" to make my own contribution to human knowledge (Polanyi, 1962, p. 67), *towards* others (Whitehead, 2014), aimed at the "flourishing of humanity" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 6). By humanity I understand the community of human beings, who, like me, are citizens of the world, that, aware or not, are moved in their knowledge and *being* by the dialectic relationships with others (Carozzi, 2018), recognising that "in the beginning is relation" (Buber, 1971 in Yaron, 1993, p. 135). The development of my educational knowledge might be a way to stress the significance of the other (Yamamoto, 1988) in giving a reason to my *being*. It aims at being my personal contribution actively to take forward the hopes of others: of those who enhanced my authentic education as the human way of being a learner (Magrini, 2011).

> "I do not get to tell the end of my students' stories, only my own! I know now my hope for the future rests partly with the choices that Giulia is going to make for herself. "(Laidlaw, 2018, p. 49)

> "We are hoping that you will contribute with us in sustaining a critical and creative engagement within a living-culture-of-enquiry that is focused on personal/professional improvement to contribute to a global social movement that is focused on the flourishing of humanity." (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019, n. p.)

I intend to carry out my self-enquiry using a Living Theory methodology which stresses the centrality of the I in asking and evolving responses "that transform practice and knowledge in the process of researching them" (Whitehead, 2018, p. 5). The practices, the actions (Treccani, 2009; Berestein, 1971) and the research of the self are the starting points of a Living Theory methodology (Whitehead et al., 2019). Therefore, I am planning to highlight the importance of re-enaction (Responding to matters of power and academic freedom, 2006). Because my I might be enquired into and then studied, a we, intended as the coming together of unique and equal human beings moving towards the reciprocal understanding of each other in the attempt to create shared meanings, may be enhanced.

Identification of the relevant literature

I intend to explore literature coming from different disciplines, as "interdisciplinary research is inspiring of human pursuits— one that provides a format for conversations and connections that lead to new knowledge" (National Academics, 2005 in Bililign, 2013, p. 82). By looking at different disciplines, "I will satisfy the human being in me" (Laidlaw, 2004, p. 3) grounded in Popper's vision: "we are not students of some subject matter, but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or disciplines" (1963, p. 88). I will access materials ranging from development management (Abbott, 2008; Chambers, 2017) to psychology (Peck, 1978; Sardello, 2008; Satir, 2013), from theology (Buber, 1947) to philosophy (Arendt, 1958; Polanyi, 1962; Reid, 1980), from

education (Greene 1988; Yamamoto, 1988; Laidlaw, 1996; Magrini, 2011; Whitehead *et al.*, 2019; Whitehead, 2018) to social science (Spender, 1985; Segal, 2011).

A sense of unity between such diverse sources will come from selecting texts in which I perceive a tension from the authors towards enquiring into their own meaningful way of being, struggling with authenticity in both being present and becoming oneself. The literature selection will be the outcome of a dialectic relationship with others, who are part of the social formations in which I live and which I intend to investigate (Whitehead, 2018).

I recognise that using a Living Theory methodology brings in the concept of emergence (Whitehead, 2018). It is therefore difficult to predict precisely the outcomes of the research. This aspect applies also to the identification of the relevant literature that will partly emerge while undertaking my enquiry.

I wish, however, to underline how I see as potentially fundamental Laidlaw's Ph.D. research (1996) given its strong ontological stance. The same applies to Whitehead's text (2018) which would probably be the main source to frame my living theory enquiry.

The authors cited at the beginning of this section made an impact in the creation of this proposal and will almost certainly play a key role in my research; I will include other sources: these will be the emergent outcomes of dialectic and educational relationships.

Key research questions

- How can I show the relevance of the dialectic with others in enabling my dynamic ontology and, at the same time, try to take ownership of myself?

- How can my self-enquiry become the dynamic process through which I try to enhance the responsibility for myself harmoniously-together with the one towards others?

- How can I answer a central Living Theory question (how can I improve my practice?) whilst perceiving a fragmentation in my roles and identities?

- How can I feel and know that my ontological perimeter is changing?

- What will the epistemological contribution of this research be, based on my ontological and subjective stances and engagement with the ideas of others?

Methodology

I intend to use a Living Theory methodology, which is considered a form of self-study grounded in enquiring the self and its practices, aimed at the generation of a sharable educational knowledge (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). The relevance placed on the *I* in Living Theory (Whitehead, 2018), will enable me to carry out the ontological quest starting from my own point of view (Polanyi, 1962). It will also "satisfy the human being in me" (Laidlaw, 2004, p. 3) by undertaking the "existential and intellectual" (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019, p. n.a.) decision of clarifying, disclosing and improving my *being*-in the world with others. I believe this is the appropriate methodology to "learn about the process of improving my ontological authenticity" (Laidlaw and Whitehead, 1995, p. 20) starting from an analysis of my actions.

To gain clarity about my own developmental being, I aim at employing action-reflection cycles which are used in Living Theory research as a means to progress in the enquiry (Whitehead et al., 2019). I wish to stress, however, that my living theory research will take the shape of a self-study only after the self-enquiry, intended as the "process of consciously thinking about our experience, feelings and actions", and "about the ontological values we use to give meaning to our lives", will be clarified (Whitehead, 2018, p. 188). Only after having clarified the what, the how and the why of my I (Whitehead, 2019), I will engage in the self-study intended as the generation of my own living educational theory (Whitehead et al., 2019). I hope that through enquiring "How do I improve what I am doing?" and trying to define "what am I doing?" through the exploration of my values, of the context in which I live/lived and my educational influences, the I will appear in greater clarity.

I intend to use narrative enquiries, included auto-ethnography, to bring in my research re-enaction (Arendt, 1958). These will be the first steps towards looking at the meanings of my life (Trahar, 2009). Through narrative enquiries, I plan to give space to those encounters that enabled my authentic learning, to the aesthetic and subjective dimensions of both context and atmosphere, which contributed to my learning processes (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007). Through auto-biography and auto-ethnography I will aim at bringing forward the study of my own human, educational experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I see the use of narrative enquiries a way of learning about my own educational development (Magrini, 2011) and a constructive means to enhance the creation of my own educational knowledge.

Timescale/Research Planning

Research stage	Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Preliminary readings	Exploration of literature to form broad ideas of the topic area	X		
Explore in depth the back ground	Selection of the key texts and deep analysis	X		
Re-enaction	Through action-reflection cycles, narrative inquiries, auto-ethnography build data collection.	X	X	
Merging literature with data	Following research questions, build answers merging primary and secondary data		X	

Evaluate my findings	Validation process through sharing data with my supervisors (by emails, skype calls, Living Theory meetings) and with other dialectic colleagues/friends as the Sunday Skype Living Theory Research Support Group	X
Writing the thesis	Put together findings in a self-study	X