

Review of Mark Potts's doctoral dissertation "How can I Reconceptualise International Educational Partnerships as a Form of 'Living Citizenship'?"

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In the abstract to his thesis Mark Potts explains how his idea of living global citizenship emerged over a ten-year period from the partnership activities between Salisbury High School and Nqabakazulu School in the black township of Kwamashu in Durban, South Africa. Within the living boundaries of this partnership Mark demonstrates how he clarified and communicated the values of social justice, equal opportunities and the African notion of Ubuntu, or humanity within his understanding of living global citizenship.

One of the most constructive criticisms of living-educational-theories was written by the late Susan Noffke in 1997. I think that it is worth quoting in full below because it explains my own commitment to include, within a living-educational-theory, an engagement with issues of power and privilege in society. It also explains my selection of Mark Pott's doctoral thesis for featuring in this issue of EJOLTs because of the clarification and communication of the values he uses to distinguish living global citizenship in a way that engages with issues of power and privilege in society:

The idea of practitioners questioning the basis of their work is an essential element to action research efforts across a wide variety of contexts (e.g., Carr & Kemmis, 1988; Elliott, 1991; Whitehead, 1993; Zeichner, 1993). Some (e.g., Dadds 1995) highlight subjectivity and practitioner reflection and are rich explorations of the layers of self in action research. Others, while also including the subjective, lived experiences of practitioners, centre on the personal and professional growth of the individual teacher as a "means for the principled modification of professional practice" (Wells, 1994, p. 25).

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There is some evidence too, that concepts such as freedom, rationality, justice, democracy, and so forth, play a role in the examination of both personal theories and practices (e.g., McNiff, 1993). These, in turn, are seen as acting to encourage and support efforts to challenge trends within the educational system such as obstructing the realization of the "living educational theory" (Whitehead, 1993).

As vital as such a process of self-awareness is to identifying the contradictions between one's espoused theories and one's practices, perhaps because of its focus on individual learning, it only begins to address the social basis of personal belief systems. While such efforts can further a kind of collective agency (McNiff, 1988), it is a sense of agency built on ideas of society as a collection of autonomous individuals. As such, it seems incapable of addressing social issues in terms of the interconnections between personal identity and the claim of experiential knowledge, as well as power and privilege in society (Dolby, 1995; Noffke, 1991). The process of personal transformation through the examination of practice and self-reflection may be a necessary part of social change, especially in education; it is however, not sufficient.' (Noffke, 1997, p. 329)

Writing with Steve Coombs, his doctoral supervisor, in a presentation at the 2012 Conference of British Educational Research Association, Potts and Coombs explain their focus on 'critically active citizens' (Coombs & Potts, 2012):

Adapting Whitehead's (2005) living educational theory approach to action research, "Living Citizenship" supports and problematises international educational partnerships' through the influence of enabling participants' as critically active citizens. Such pro-active fieldwork links the values and objectives of social justice and knowledge exchange to proffering educational change within authentic i-CPD professional learning environments.



Video 1. Video of Mark Potts introducing his doctorate (http://youtu.be/ZD_qtHiWuIM).

References

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