

Review of Moira Laidlaw's doctoral thesis How Can I Create My Own Living Educational Theory As I Offer You An Account Of My Educational Development?

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Moira Laidlaw's doctoral thesis in 1996 was the first doctorate to be awarded by the University of Bath in 1996 with Living Educational Theory in the title. Some twenty years since its submission Laidlaw's thesis retains its originality in showing what it means for a teacher-researcher to bring, amongst others, an aesthetic standard of judgment to bear on educative relationships. These relationships range from Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Higher Degree education students and classroom pupils in the action enquiry: 'How do I help my students and pupils to improve the quality of their learning?'

Laidlaw's living-theory methodology is not limited to action research. Laidlaw also integrates narrative enquiry by showing how fictional narratives can be used to express ontological understandings in a claim to educational knowledge. This is done by using insights from Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner' to illuminate her own educational values. There are two reasons that Laidlaw's thesis retains its relevance to today's enquiries.

The first reason is that it opens the way for the use of insights from the arts in clarifying, communicating and evolving the values that researcher's use to give meaning and purpose to their professional lives and to explain their educational influences in learning.

The second reason is that by describing and explaining her own educational development in the creation of her own 'living educational theory', Laidlaw makes an original contribution to educational knowledge. Laidlaw does this by showing how values-based explanatory principles can form living standards of judgment. These are the standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of the contribution to knowledge being made by a practitioner-researcher.

What makes Laidlaw's thesis so relevant today is her work on aesthetics. For those of us who believe, like myself, that education is a form of art in the sense of giving a form to life itself through learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity, Laidlaw offers a form of 'aesthetic morphology' for communicating the life of learning and research of a Living Theory researcher. Laidlaw focuses on her educational relationships. These include her educational influences with students on an Action Research Postgraduate Programme at the University of Bath. In her thesis, Laidlaw answers her question, 'How can I reveal the aesthetic morphology of my educative relationship with Sarah?' Much educational research has limited value in explaining the educational influences of an educator in a student's learning, with an engagement from and responses to a student's voice. This is a strength of Laidlaw's doctoral writings and emphasizes the importance of ontological and relational values that express a loving warmth of humanity in educational relationships. I have read and re-read Laidlaw's thesis several times since its submission and continue to find it inspirational. I believe that you will feel the same.



Video 1: Video of Moira Laidlaw introducing her thesis (<https://youtu.be/hVfw1YA5mpY>)

Reference

Laidlaw, M. (1996) *How Can I Create My Own Living Educational Theory As I Offer You An Account Of My Educational Development?* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bath. Retrieved 2 December 2015 from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/moira2.shtml>