Integrating personal, political, and professional educational practice that gives meaning and purpose to my life and work

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Abstract

This paper shows Living Theory research as a form of research that enables me to recognize and research the integration of my personal, professional, and political educational practice to improve, with the hope of give fuller expression to my ontological and social values in practice and live a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile.

Changes in policy and practice in 2012, demanded by central government, meant my field of practice had to change. My concerns however were, and still are, that practice, theory and research often appear to lose connection with the educational purpose of education; theory and practice appear to be developed independently and without explanation or evaluation related to educational values and; educational practitioners appear to practice in discrete worlds, each vying to exert their hegemony over the development of educational theory, practice and provision. In this paper I show how, by continuing to research as a Living Theory researcher (Whitehead, 1989), I am addressing those concerns as I try to improve what I am doing to realise my values in action and integrate personal, professional and political educational practice that gives meaning and purpose to my work and life. I describe and explain my developing understanding of Living Theory research as a multidimensional, relationally-dynamic and collaborative form of research, in which collaboration is an expression of embodied meanings of 'i am because we are', together with 'we are because i am' – represented as i~we~i.

Keywords: **Living Theory research; living-educational-theory; Collaboration; Praxis; Multidimensional relationally-dynamic.**

Introduction

> I began by observing that you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer. (Collingwood 1991, p. 31)

The question in my mind that has given rise to this paper is, 'How can I contribute to the flourishing of humanity as I live a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worth-while?'

The question has arisen and evolved from my doctoral research. In 2012 I successfully submitted my doctoral thesis (Huxtable, 2012), which was created in the process of researching my practice in order to improve it. My practice was that of a senior educational psychologist, responsible for implementing an *inclusive* local authority policy on high-ability learning. The work was named APEX (ALL are **A**ble **P**upils **EX**tending Opportunities). (Details accessible from http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/apex/livinglegacies2012.pdf.) I had responsibility for developing educational provision that would enhance each child's and young person's abilities to learn to live loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives for themselves and others. The educational provision included the development of a programme of workshops for children and young people, collaborative learning-opportunities for them and their teachers, and conferences, workshops and a professional Masters as in-service professional development for teachers and teaching-assistants.

As I researched my practice as a professional educational practitioner in order to improve it, I clarified my ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, as well as social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society, as they emerged within living-boundaries through the evolution of my living-theory praxis (Huxtable, 2012). I continue to draw on the following original ideas I developed through my doctoral research:

- Living Educational Theory praxis, highlighting the fundamental importance of educators creating "values-based explanation of their educational influences in learning" (Whitehead, 1989), as they research to develop praxis within living-boundaries.
- Living-boundaries as co-creative spaces within which energy-flowing values can be clarified and communicated.
- Inclusive gifted and talented education developed from an educational perspective, which enables each learner to develop and offer talents, expertise and knowledge as life-affirming and life-enhancing gifts. The knowledge is that created of the world, of self, and self in and of the world.
- Living-Theory TASC, a relationally-dynamic and multidimensional approach to research and developing praxis, which integrates Living Theory research (Whitehead,

1989) with Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace & Adams, 1993). (TASC is a form of Action Research used internationally by learners of all ages.)

Changes in policy and practice demanded by central government meant my employment with the local authority was terminated in 2012. Since then my fields of practice have changed but my concerns have not. My concerns were, and are: that practice, theory and research often appear to lose connection with the educational purpose of education; theory and practice appear to be developed independently without explanation or evaluation related to educational values and; educational practitioners appear to practice in discrete worlds each vying to exert their hegemony over the development of educational theory, practice and provision.

Since the termination of my paid employment I have employed myself in new fields of practice, and continue to research as a Living Theory researcher (Whitehead, 2008) and learn from and with members of an ever-expanding Living Theory community. You can get a sense of the diversity of fields of practice and cultural contexts the Living Theory community embraces by visiting the homepage of the living-posters (Figure 1). You can also access my own poster from the homepage, which provides a visual overview of some of my current practice and connections, and indicates some of the people with whom I collaborate. The 1:27 minute video with the link in the top right hand corner of the living-poster provides a brief introduction to what matters to me.

Figure 1. Living-posters Home Page
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage061115.pdf

I continue to engage in Living Theory research as this enables me to address my concerns by developing and integrating personal, professional and political educational

practice that gives meaning and purpose to my work and life. This account is in the form of a multimedia-narrative to communicate my meanings of a multidimensional and relationally-dynamic understanding of collaboration and educational practice. This understanding is an expression of meanings of 'i am because we are', and 'we are because i am', represented as i~we~i (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2016).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows:

- My developing understanding of Living Theory research and addressing some confusions and criticisms.
- Living Theory research as an integration of personal, professional, political educational practice.
- Conclusion.

Clarifying my understanding of 'Living Theory research' (Living Educational Theory research), and 'living-theory' (living-educational-theory).

Thanks to the ambiguity of the English language, 'living theory' can be understood to have different meanings, and it is this that has led to confusion and misunderstanding, exemplified by this extract from McNiff's (2013) recent writings:

> … Whitehead has aimed to develop a form of theory different from traditional propositional forms... he calls this 'living theory'. I have always seen the term as a verb more than noun — i.e. theory is something you do and live (not an unusual idea in the literatures; see also Chomsky's idea of 'I-theories' below) — and I have actively supported it, from my perspective that practitioners live their own theories of practice through the way they conduct the practice and explain how they do so. If 'theory' is about offering descriptions and explanation for a practice, practitioners' explanations for how and why they practise as they do constitute their personal theories of practice, and these theories are dynamic, living and transformational. My support for the idea even extended to my writing a book and putting Jack's name as first author to honour his contributions to the field, although the book you are reading moves beyond the ideas explored there.
>
> However, I have become increasingly concerned that the original idea of 'living theory' (as a practical form of action) seems to have become reified into 'Living Theory' (as a proper noun denoting a movement). This change can be confusing for practitioners. A teacher once asked me at a workshop, 'What is the difference between "living theory" and "action research"?' (this may have been 'Living Theory'). The idea of 'Living Theory' as a reified object presents the theory as something separate from the practice. Once again, 'theory' becomes an object of study rather than a living practice, and the reification of the term potentially denies the very principles and values that inspired it. So since about 2010 1 have distanced myself from this form of language.
>
> Since the 1970s Whitehead has aimed to have this form of theory legitimated by the Academy, so the focus of the work has now shifted from legitimation for the form of theory to securing influence at world level. (p.65)

McNiff talks of 'living theory' simply as a theory that is living, in the sense of evolving. Living theory can also be taken to mean people are doing the living and they are living a theory as a form of practice. What she does not refer to is 'living-theory' as a term Whitehead (1989) coined to mean a valid, values-based explanation created by a practitioner-researcher of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in. All living-theories are living, that is to say, evolving. All living-theories are lived, that is, the individual is trying to give as full an expression as they can to their life-affirming and life-enhancing values as they live and work, recognizing and resolving contradictions as far as they can. However, not all living theories are living-theories!

I have used a hyphen to clearly identify living-theory and upper case to identify Living Theory research as nouns with an explicit meaning given to them by Whitehead (1989). (I will further clarify what I understand by these nouns later.) McNiff does not refer to living-theory or Living Theory research and so does not go beyond it as she claims here. Living Theory research, far from separating theory, action, practice and values, brings them together to form generative and transformational praxis with a moral intent. I began to address this in my thesis in 2012 and will leave further discussion for another paper. I do agree with McNiff that Living Theory research is in the process of becoming a movement and Whitehead's focus has shifted from just enabling living-theories to be legitimated by the Academy, to also working to secure influence of Living Theory research at world-level to enhance the contribution it can make to the flourishing of humanity.

Noffke (1997) offers a different criticism of Living Theory research on the grounds that it is self-study research and:

> [t]he 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. (p. 329)

In Living Theory research, the generative and transformational educational influence a person has on others and on social formations through their way of being, is recognized as far more complex than Noffke suggests. In Living Theory research, there is an explicit recognition of the influence of the individual in and on the collective. Fowler and Christakis (2008,) working in a different field, refer to this in their paper, *'Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network'*:

> More generally, conceptions of health and concerns for the well-being of both individuals and populations are increasingly broadening to include diverse 'quality of life' attributes, including happiness. Most important from our perspective is the recognition that people are embedded in social networks and that the health and well-being of one person affects the health and well-being of others. This fundamental fact of existence provides a conceptual justification for the specialty of public health. Human happiness is not merely the province of isolated individuals. (p.8)

Many living-educational-theories, as well as mine, include explanations of educational influence in the learning of socio-cultural formations and answer Noffke's criticism by contributing to the development of personal, professional and political practice. This claim is

supported by many living-theory theses such as the latest of Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi, *Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education In Pakistan*, accredited by Kathmandu University, Nepal, 2016. (Qutoshi, 2016). There are many others, some of which can be found via http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml.

To be sure we are sharing an understanding of Living Theory research (Living Educational Theory research) and living-theory (living-educational-theory) I will clarify my understandings of both. I use capitals to distinguish Living Educational Theory research (often shortened to Living Theory research) from an individual's living-educational-theory (often shortened to living-theory).

Living Theory research offers a distinct educational paradigm, approach and methodology for self-study to educational practitioner-researchers who want to contribute to the growth of an educational knowledge base. Whitehead (1980) distinguishes between education and educational research, and knowledge with respect to the disciplines like Pring (2000), but goes further than Pring to distinguish what is educational research and knowledge by reference to the nature of values and the theory generated. The values referred to are the life-affirming and life-enhancing values that give the practitioner-researcher's life and work purpose and meaning, and are a "better source of motivation for engaging in bigger-than-self problems than other values" (Crompton, 2010, p. 9).

In Living Theory research, the ontological and social values are those that give an individual's life meaning and purpose and carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. They form the explanatory principles and standards of judgment of the practitioner-researcher's practice. Beliefs are what I believe to be true. Values and beliefs are often aligned but not always. For instance, I have been aware of the tensions created by the 'nature-nurture' argument amongst psychologists and its implication for the educational system since I embarked on my first degree in psychology. I realized then that while some were making claims (and still do) about the relationship between race and intelligence, there was nothing that would persuade me of the rightness of their argument, which provides the underpinning of the eugenics movement.

One of the attractions of Living Theory research to me is that, through researching my practice, I clarify where I am living a contradiction, in order to find a way of giving expression to my life-affirming and life-enhancing values as fully as I can as I go about the messy business of living in a real world. I realize not all my values are those that contribute to the flourishing of humanity. I find Crompton's work particularly helpful in identifying where I hold conflicting values, some concerned with the flourishing of humanity and others which are self-serving and far from humane. My aspiration is to give more expression to my 'self-transcendent' and 'open to change' values and in that I share an aspiration that is trans-cultural. Crompton shows, "… people's values tend to cluster in remarkably similar ways across cultures..." (p. 9). It appears that there are more people who want to live values that hold the hope of the flourishing of humanity than those who do not, which I find encouraging. I might be wrong to say that, if you are primarily motivated to live values that are self-serving and alienating, then Living Theory research is not for you, and in saying that I recognise myself as a living contradiction. However, I take heart and hope from Laidlaw's (1996) notion that values are living and in the course of the research can be transformed, as the account by Sanja Mandarić (2011) demonstrates. Prof. Moira Laidlaw and Ass. Prof.

Branko Bognar mentored Sanja Mandarić who presented her paper at the Zagreb conference. I was inspired by her courage to show how she became more self-aware and the influence that her mentors and her research had on her, as illustrated by the note from Branko Bognar to her that she includes in her account:

> It seems to me that your values at the beginning of this project were not the same as today. This means, that you did not like from the beginning to establish a child-centred classroom, since you even did not know what it looked like. But through your communication with Moira and other project participants you became aware of a different educational approach which was opposite to your practice of that time as well as to your values (B. Bognar, personal communication, 23 May 2009). (Mandarić 2011, p. 308)

Biesta (2006) identifies the importance of being clear about the language we use when he writes, "Something has been lost in the shift from the language of education to the language of learning" (p.14), and argues that we need to develop an educational language. He also said:

> ... education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their 'coming into the world' as unique, singular beings. (p. 27)

I agree. I understand that meanings, of what constitutes 'educational' learning, keep a connection between an individual's learning to create knowledge of the world, and knowledge of themselves, whilst they live values that give meaning and purpose to their lives. Living Theory researchers are concerned with values that are life-affirming and life-enhancing. Crompton (2010) refers to these as intrinsic. Intrinsic values include, "the value placed on a sense of community, affiliation to friends and family, and self-development." (p.9).

Living Theory research is a form of self-study educational practitioner-research. The purpose of Living Theory research is for the researcher to develop, test and share educational knowledge of their personal, professional and political practice that holds the hope of contributing to the development of a world in which humanity can flourish, in the process of enquiring into their field/discipline practice to improve it. By researching field/discipline practice to improve it *and* create an explanation of their educational influence in learning, the individual does not see a division between their different fields of practice and does not see himself or herself as a person existing or acting in isolation. Rather they recognise the multidimensional, relationally-dynamic nature of the complex social, historical and cultural ecologies they are part of. When I say, 'contribute to the flourishing of humanity', I mean both in terms of the flourishing of humanity as a species and the flourishing of humanity, i.e. humanitarian values, such as those of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society. By inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian I mean:

- Inclusive – valuing the unique contributions each person develops and offers to enhance their own well-being, that of others and the collective.
- Emancipating – each person accepting and expressing their responsibility to enhance their own learning and life and to contribute to that of others.

- Egalitarian – the individual is neither subservient nor dominant to another or the collective but each exerts their power *with* others and self, to co-create.

A living-educational-theory

...of professional practice can be constructed from practitioners' enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' The significance of 'I' existing as a living contradiction in such enquiries is considered and other epistemological issues related to values, validity and generalisability are discussed from the living perspective. (Whitehead, 1989, p. 40)

The researcher's ontological and social values that give meaning and purpose to their life are clarified as they emerge and evolve in the process of enquiry. These values form the researcher's explanatory principles and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) in valid accounts of their educational influence in learning. An individual's account of their living-theory includes where they have identified themselves living a contradiction, either where they recognize they are contradicting their values in practice, or experience their values contradicted by others. Their research and account includes how they try to resolve these tensions in the direction of living their life-affirming and life-enhancing values as fully as they can.

The ontological values, which emerged in the course of my doctoral research, are those of loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility. I believe that the values researched and clarified in the course of my Living Theory research are also social and relational. I cannot live alone. The worst thing you can do to a human being is to keep them isolated. Humans are social and relational beings. So I think it is important that I clarify my social values as well. Through my doctoral research I began to articulate mine as those of an inclusive, emancipating, egalitarian society. My ontological and social values continue to form my explanatory principles and the standards by which I judge my practice. They also provide the threads that interweave my practice – past, present and future – and show Living Theory research as transforming and generative research as it enables me to recognize, research, integrate and improve my personal, professional, and political educational practice, and so live a loving life that is more satisfying, productive and worthwhile.

The validity of an account of a living-theory is tested and strengthened by asking questions that draw on Habermas (1976). I incorporated these into the questions I posed the examiners of my thesis:

- Do I present here educational research at the leading edge of the field; provide evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement, and material that is worthy of publication?
- Is my story understandable? Do you know what I have done, why I have done what I have done and how I hold myself to account?
- Is my story believable? Do I provide enough evidence to support my claims to know my practice and that I do seek to live as fully as I can the values that give meaning and purpose to my life?
- Are my educational values and the normative contexts of my work clear?
- Do I offer a well-reasoned and reasonable explanation of why I do what I do?

- In reading this account, has your imagination been stimulated and have those thoughts contributed anything to your educational journey as you seek to improve your educational contexts and relationships? (Huxtable, 2012, pp. 43-44)

'Living Theory research' as an integration of personal, professional, political educational practice.

Personal educational practice

Living Theory research is a form of self-study. The purpose of this form of self-study is not vanity but one that enables the researcher to hold themself to account to live the values that give their life and work meaning and purpose as fully as possible. The self is not in isolation, self-serving, but one that is both an expression of the unique individuality of each person's self and their relational self. This was first represented as i~we by Whitehead and Huxtable (2006). More recently the notion of 'i am because we are', which comes from Ubuntu, has been extended to integrate understanding of, 'we are because i am' as represented by i~we~i (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2016). The collaborating individuals (i) and the collective (we) they are part of create a living-boundary (~) between them. A living-boundary (Huxtable, 2012) is a trustworthy, co-creative, multidimensional, relationally-dynamic space.

I use 'i' to stand for the individual – that is me, you and all those other individuals that comprise the collective 'we'. 'i' stands for the self that is trying to contribute to the flourishing of humanity and to extend their love to others and themselves as a person living a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile .

I had a conversation with Robyn Pound about how I might improve my research-supervision. At the time Robyn Pound was a Health Visitor in the UK, a Living Theory researcher and an Adlerian practitioner. We had been talking about the relationship between the 'I' (standing for the egotistical self which usually wants to be recognised) and the 'i', (standing for the ontological and relational self, which quite often doesn't want to be recognised) and the problem of holding them together rather than one or the other being subordinate – in other words, how to hold them together in a productive harmony that feels satisfying. What she says is very relevant here; "Any research method that supports the development/confident unification of your 'i' with your 'I' will help answer your question…" (R. Pound, personal communication, May 17, 2015).

The importance of recognition and valuing the self comprising both the 'I' and the 'i' of the unique individual person is identified by Fukuyama (1992):

> Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (p. xvii)

 I recognise myself as a living contradiction as I often try to suppress and subordinate my own 'I' to my 'i' while I encourage people to recognize and value both their 'I' and 'i' as they work to enhance and spread their educational influence in learning as contributions to

the flourishing of humanity. I will illustrate what I mean by reference to the *BRLSI (Bath and Royal Literary Scientific Institute) Researchers project*. A summary of the project is provided on the web (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The introduction to the BRLSI Researchers project accessible from http://www. brlsiyouthgallery. org/brlsi-researchers/brlsi-researchers-2014-2015-report/

At the end of the project the young people and the doctoral and postdoctoral students prepared and presented posters to an invited audience of family, friends, guests and dignitaries. By following links to the videos in Figure 3 you can access the posters they prepared to communicate the knowledge they created over six months and more, and sense their vitality, energy and passion as they presence and value their 'I' and 'i'. In sharing their knowledge, I believe they each experienced themselves as twice affirmed, as I have heard Whitehead put it on various occasions quoting from Bernstein:

> Suppose we had produced things as human beings: in his production each of us would have twice affirmed himself and the other. (Bernstein, 1971, p. 48)
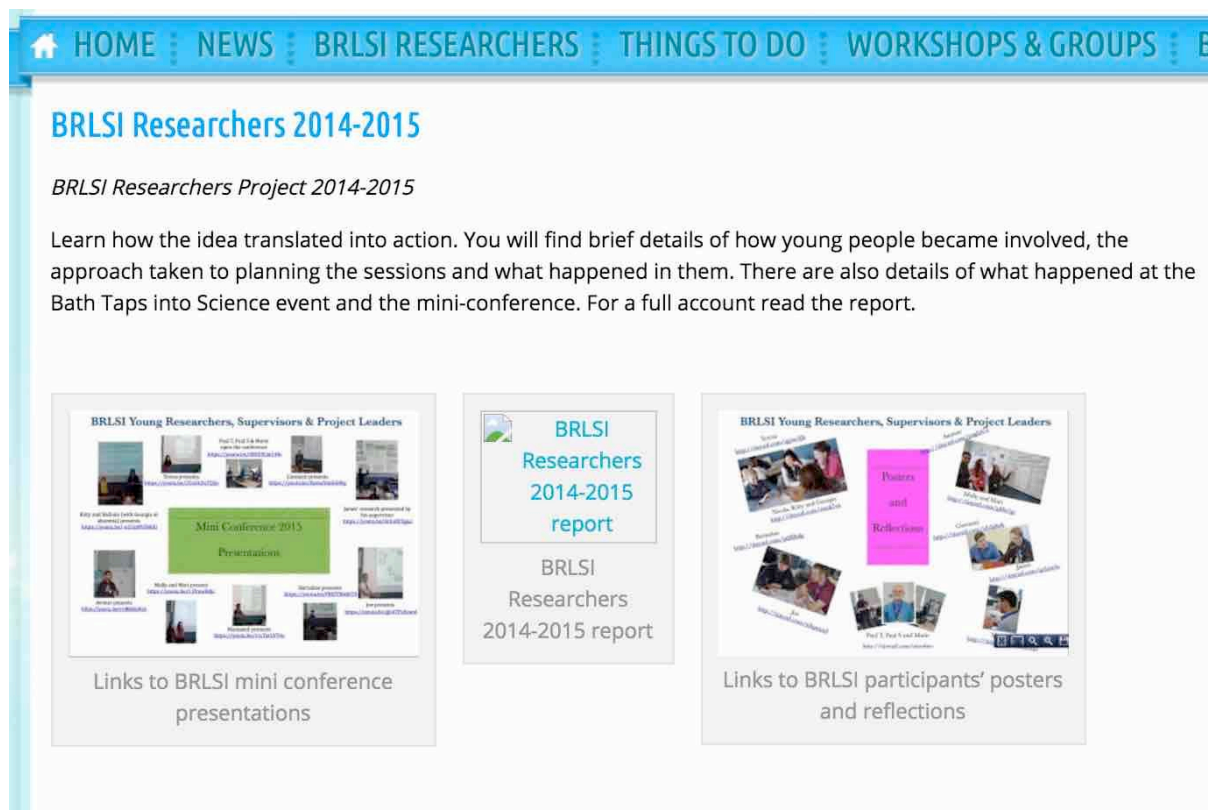
Figure 3. Report of the pilot BRLSI Researchers project accessible from http://www. brlsiyouthgallery. org/brlsi-researchers/brlsi-researchers-2014-2015-report/

Another example of collaboration expressing embodied meanings of i~we~i can be seen in the work of *Moving on Up*. I have the privilege of being asked to support their research. *Moving on Up* is a collaborative venture between *Bath and North East Somerset Council's Sport and the Active Lifestyles Team*, *Make a Move* charity, *Sirona's Health Visiting Team*, *Percy Crèche Services* and parents. The purpose of *Move on Up* is to tackle postnatal depression (PND) through movement and exercise. *The Lottery* funds the project for three years. Michelle Rochester is the chief executive and founder of the charity and uses movement as an intuitive practitioner:

> Make a Move is a charity founded on the principles of music and movement making people HAPPY! We are driven by our desire to improve the mental-health of all we have the pleasure of taking on a journey.
>
> … We do this by instilling an absolute awareness of the bond between BODY and MIND, inspiring laughter, encouraging a sense of fun and promoting happiness. (http://www. makeamove. org. uk/)

Sarah Haddow is a dance and movement psychotherapist working with Michelle Rochester in the charity. Robyn Pound is a Health Visitor and Living Theory researcher who uses Adlerian psychology. She has supported many of the mothers to participate and has created an account of the project in her paper*, Moving on Up! Therapeutic movement for*

postnatal anxiety and depression: finding significance through alongsideness, enquiring collaboratively and living theory action research in health visiting (Pound, 2014). In the paper Pound shows how:

> Values of alongsideness act as explanatory principles and standards for practice evaluation. As an epistemology, alongsideness employs Living Theory (Whitehead 1989). Accessibility for participants unfamiliar with this research is increased by calling the developmental process 'enquiring collaboratively. (Abstract)

Michelle, Sarah and Robyn are the core of the project research group and offer a series of sessions of guided movement to reduce postnatal 'low mood' of post-partum mothers. They invited me to help keep them focused on researching their practice. As you will see on the website there is plenty of evidence to support the claim that the project is making a difference, but there is no data to enable us to understand or explain what Michelle, Sarah and Robyn are doing that contributes to making a difference. It was not ethically possible to collect visual data of the sessions but Robyn was able to video Michelle and Sarah dancing together and expressing their relationship, which they bring into the Moving on Up sessions and other Make a Move projects. With this data we can get closer to understanding and communicating a multidimensional and relationally-dynamic comprehension of their collaboration, which is an expression of embodied meanings of 'i am because we are', together with 'we are because i am', represented as i~we~i.

The live links in Figure 4 below, on the next page, are beneath the figure:
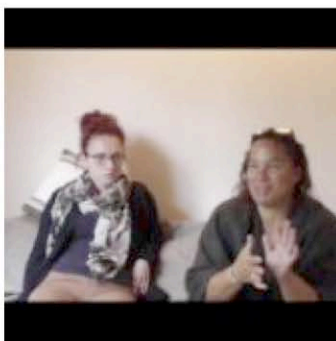
**Sarah and Michelle analyse their relationship
using a video of them dancing together**
September 2016

After a *Moving on Up* session in July 2014, which posed questions about how we handled a particularly unwell group of women, Sarah and Michelle expressed themselves by dancing together. Looking at this last of the three videos again in 2016, they look for evidence of how they relate together to find clues about how they work.

Marie asks questions which stimulate the timed assessment below:

https://youtu.be/L7vQd1DKkXM

The video they are analysisng:
 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyb1Eq-xGWU&feature=youtu.be

		Sarah	Michelle
0.02 0.06		0.06 Michelle isn't quite ready to begin and I'm moving slowly, in this moment it represents a moment of suspense, I could have begun moving while Michelle was sorting out her jumper. Instead I begun moving slowly, and making a clear point that I am not going to move too quickly so you cant catch up, I'm moving but I am still waiting, is this a slight representation of how our working relationships works, in that I wont move on until she is ready, so that we begin this together yet still clearly individuals in the space.	0.04 M sees S and mirrors and takes the lead from S

Figure 4. **Extract of data and analysis of videos https://youtu.be/L7vQd1DKkXM and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyb1Eq-xGWU&feature=youtu.be**

Figure 5. Screen shot of moment at 1. 44 of video accessible from
https://www. youtube. com/watch?v=iyb1Eq-xGWU&feature=youtu. be

I wrote to Michelle, Sarah and Robyn:

At 1.44 and 1.57 I see you expressing the pleasure and fun of what you created between you in the living-boundary you have formed between you. A living-boundary is a safe, co-creative space that is inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian. You both identify the relationally-dynamic quality of your collaboration but what you don't identify here, but you do elsewhere, is the multidimensional knowledge of self and other you bring into the space here. You know each other well over many years in different ways. You acknowledge elsewhere the educational influence you have had, and continue to have in your own learning and that of each other, and the other's educational influence in your learning, which I believe contributes to what I see you doing here. I may be mistaken but what I see is a physical expression of what I mean by 'collaboration that is multidimensional and relationally-dynamic' and enhances our ability to 'research the personal, the political, the professional, and the practice' in a way that is 'inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian.' I think this communicates something of what you do in MoU. I see a trusting, co-creative space I believe you create through your practice that you invite the mums into. I think you express your educational responsibility towards them by developing a space they can feel safe in, they can trust in, and in that space enter a dimension they are not familiar with, a dimension created by movement rather than words, where they can explore different ways of knowing themselves and their relationship with others. As 'educator' with an educational responsibility I have heard how you are careful to keep your personal problems out of the space you create for the mums, but bring aspects of your 'self' into the space that humanizes it.

Robyn (who caught the occasion on video) responded to Michelle and Sarah's analysis and added photos of the moments they reflect on:

It is beautiful to put these interpretations [above] together with the film. I have watched and read both your interpretations and looked at what you each said about the same clips. There is such synergy in your interpretations. I got so much more from watching you than I have before, now I have dried my eyes. Love it! It has got to be useful in helping us understand what is going on in the room now that you have done this. It would be interesting if you did the same for the earlier clips where you noticed a different dynamic. Thank you both so much. I really enjoyed watching you.

The reflections and learning by Michelle, Sarah, Robyn and myself are not just formed by what we see in the video: we are informed by other times and contexts past, present and future. I can see that what excites me about their work is a realization in practice of values that give my life and work purpose. I see them expressing a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and an educational responsibility for themselves and towards other, and together create an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian context. Michelle, Sarah and Robyn created the video and reflections as part of their research into their professional educational practice to improve it.

Professional educational practice

A key concern of a Living Theory researcher is to create and make public valid accounts of their living-theory research to contribute to the development of an educational knowledge-base. In doing so the researcher is going beyond researching to improve 'personal educational practice' to contribute to improving their own and other people's 'professional educational practice'.

Jack Whitehead began developing Living Theory research as a contribution to the development of professional practice of teachers, as can be seen from his earliest writings such as, 'An 11-14 Mixed Ability Project in Science: The Report on a local curriculum Development,' (Whitehead, 1976) and in his 1988 presidential address to BERA (Whitehead, 1989). It is curious that, nearly 40 years later, there are still those within highly influential education establishments, such as universities, and organizations, such as BERA, that do not recognize or acknowledge teachers as professional educational practitioners. This can be seen in Winch's (2013) paper in which he answers his question, What Kind of Occupation is Teaching? He distinguishes between teachers as craftworker, executive technician and professional but he makes no reference to the contribution teachers might make as professional educational practitioners to an educational knowledge-base.

Since those early days of Living Theory research, a substantial body of work has been created by professional educational practitioners working in education and other sites of practice that are contributing to the development of an educational knowledge-base. The living-theory doctoral theses at http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml show how we can each contribute to the growth of educational knowledge irrespective of the field or country of our practices, as shown by, for example, Pound (2003) *Health Visiting in England*, Timm (2012) *Biochemistry in South Africa*, Tattersall (2011) *Community Activity in Australia.*

Living Theory research offers a credible and valid academic and scholarly form of research that enables researchers to generate and contribute new educational knowledge

through researching their own educational practice, wherever it is located. Living Theory research is academic, in the sense that it provides well-reasoned explanations and scholarly as it draws on, and critically and creatively engages with, reasonable and well-reasoned theories and knowledge of others.

Living Theory research goes beyond the challenge that Snow made in her 2001 Presidential Address to the American Educational Research Association:

> 'The…challenge is to enhance the value of personal knowledge and personal experience for practice. Good teachers possess a wealth of programs. And having standards for the systematization of personal knowledge would provide a basis for rejecting personal anecdotes as a basis for either policy or practice. ' (Snow, 2001 p. 9)

Rather than offering a basis for rejecting personal anecdote, living-theories can be recognised as valid and legitimate forms of knowledge, which contribute to a new, educational epistemology, that was called for by Schön (1995, p. 190) as eloquently expressed by Bell (1998):

> Reality is complex and no single view will be adequate to explain the nature of the complexity within and around us.

> In quoting Donald Schön, Chambers (1997) writes:

>> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he [sic] remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigour, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems and non-rigorous enquiry?

> The evolving paradigm turns this on its head, as Schön perhaps would wish. His high ground describes the conditions of normal professionalism, but a new professionalism is taking over. The imagery is upended: the swamp becomes the new high ground.

> In the new paradigm of understanding, the "swamp" or mess becomes the primary ground of understanding and learning. The challenges for the researcher grow; the sense of vulnerability and anxiety (as well as excitement) grows. Non-self-reflective practitioners have for many years focused on the manageable and the limited type of problem on which their discipline focuses… (pp. 181-182)

The growing body of literature established over 40 years justifies the claim that Living Theory is such a paradigm and is recognized internationally. I have indicated a dynamic relationship between educational theory and educational practice as I have clarified my understanding of educational research. A relationship between theory and practice with a moral purpose is indicated in some notions of praxis. The moral purpose, however, is an abstraction, whereas Living Theory research develops a form of praxis formed and informed by the researcher's 'real', lived and living, ontological and social values that give meaning

and purpose to their lives. While Living Theory research may express a particular form of understanding of praxis, not all praxis may be in the form of a living-educational-theory. As I explained above, Living Theory research draws on social notions of validity proffered by Habermas (1976) and which I added to in my thesis.

I believe that, as a professional educational practitioner, I am responsible for my practice and I am obliged continually to seek to understand, explain and improve it. Living Theory research is, therefore, a particularly appropriate form of research because it requires me to provide valid accounts of my research into my educational practice to improve it. When I worked as an educational psychologist employed by a Local Authority, I understood that as professional educational practitioner I was accountable to others: to the ethical standards of my professional body, to my employer and, most importantly, I held myself accountable to me.

There are different ways to understand 'professional', most often understood by remunerated employment. Most of my employment now is not remunerated and I struggled for some time to recognize that nonetheless I was still practicing as a professional educational practitioner. I argue here that practice can also be understood as professional even when someone is not paid to undertake a particular job. This is summarised on http://www.psc.gov.au/what-is-a-profession by the Professional Standards Council established by the Australian state and territory governments:

> The word 'profession' means different things to different people. But at its core, it's meant to be an indicator of trust and expertise.
>
> Traditionally, a "professional" was someone who derived their income from their expertise or specific talents, as opposed to a hobbyist or amateur. This still carries through to fields today, such as sport.
>
> But given today's fast-changing environment of knowledge and expertise, it's now generally understood that simply deriving an income from a particular task might make you an "expert" or "good at your job" – but if you're a "professional", this has a broader meaning.
>
> There's a long history of attempts to clarify this meaning, and to define the functions of professions. These attempts typically centralise around some sort of moral or ethical foundation within the practice of a specific and usually established expertise…
>
> A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards. This group positions itself as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and is recognised by the public as such. A profession is also prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others[1].
>
> A professional is a member of a profession. Professionals are governed by codes of ethics, and profess commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their expert domain. Professionals are accountable to those served and to society[2].

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[1] Definition from Professions Australia website: http://www.professions.com.au/about-us/what-is-a-professional (Accessed June 15, 2015).

2 Cruess, S., Johnston, S. & Cruess. R. (2004). ""Profession": a working definition for medical educators." *Teaching and learning in Medicine*, 16(1), 74-76. (Retrieved June 15, 2015)

I quote at length because it expresses many of the points about professional practice that have been important for me to confront the challenge to recognize myself as a professional educational practitioner since my employment was terminated. As I am researching my educational practice as a Living Theory researcher, I believe I continue to behave as a professional educational practitioner: I am holding myself to account to live values concerned with the flourishing of humanity as fully as possible; and, in making public valid accounts of my living-theory, I also hold myself to account to those who also want to contribute to the flourishing of humanity and contribute to the growth of an educational knowledge-base. As a Living Theory researcher, I am not only researching to improve my personal and professional practice, but also trying to offer my accounts of my living-theory with the hope of "securing influence at world-level" (McNiff, 2013), adding to the influence of Living Theory research as a social movement for the flourishing of humanity, which leads me to political practice.

Political educational practice

The difference between personal and professional educational practice and political educational practice lies in the focus of the influence I am trying to have. The foci are distinct but not discrete (borrowing from Alan Rayner, who was a member of a research group convened by Jack Whitehead). With personal educational practice, I am trying to understand and enhance my educational influence in my own learning; with professional educational practice, I am concerned with understanding and extending the educational influence of the knowledge I am creating to enhance the learning of others; with political educational practice, I am concerned with understanding and extending the educational influence of the knowledge I create. The knowledge is intended to contribute to the learning of social formations within which humanity can flourish. I am trying to develop my understanding through my Living Theory research. I am trying to extend the educational influence of the knowledge I create to influence the learning of social formations by making it public in spaces where others might hear it and in a way they might critically and creatively engage with to extend their contribution to developing social formations within which humanity can flourish.

Taleb (2010) expresses succinctly the form in which knowledge needs to be communicated for it to be influential:

> You need a story to displace a story. Metaphors and stories are far more potent (alas) than ideas; they are also easier to remember and more fun to read. If I have to go after what I call the narrative disciplines, my best tool is a narrative.
>
> Ideas come and go, stories stay. (p. xxi)

However, I am not concerned with an abstract 'story' divorced from reality but rather an educational narrative that talks to 'head, heart and body', and not only communicates a narrative but also stimulates the imagination and invites the 'reader' into a creative and dialogue concerning their own research.

Carter (1993) describes the difficulty of:

…capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal and, thus, redressed the deficiencies of the traditional atomistic and positivistic approaches in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness. (pp. 5-6)

I find an 'academic voice', which is traditionally impersonal, and simple text-based narratives, does not communicate adequately the warm inter- and intra- personal qualities of love, humanity and humour that are the core of educational knowledge. I am therefore developing multimedia narratives ostensively and iteratively to clarify and communicate the meanings of my ontological and social values in the living-boundaries between others and myself.

I am interpreting 'political' to relate to expressions of the "total complex of relations between people living in society" (definition of 'politics' – Merriam-Webster online 5a). But I need to go further and say something about the nature of the relationships and society I want to influence:

We do research to understand. We try to understand in order to make our schools better places for both the children and the adults who share their lives there. (Eisner, 1993, p. 10)

I go further than Eisner and say that I do research to try to understand in order to make this world, and not just our schools, a better place to be for all. But again, this isn't sufficient. I must say something about what I mean by 'better place for all'.

My meaning of 'a better place for all' is one that is inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian, and emerges as each person extends a loving recognition, a respectful connectedness and an educational responsibility to themselves and others: a place where each person can recognize, value and develop their own unique contributions and recognize, value and contribute to the development of other people's unique contributions to make this a place where humanity can flourish. A place where there are loving recognitions and expressions of 'I~i am because we are' and 'we are because I~i am', which I represent by i~we~i.

Living Theory research, by its very nature, involves developing collaborative or cooperative relationships with other people. 'Co-operative' and 'collaborative' are often used interchangeably and inconsistently. I therefore need to clarify how I am using 'cooperative' within meanings of political educational practice. My meanings are similar to those of the International Co-operative Alliance:

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

… A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. (Accessed from http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles)

I see these as consistent with my ontological and social values, which serve here to explain my practice, why I do what I do, and judge whether what I do contributes to making this a better place for us all. This definition of *a* co-operative helps me connect the relationship between co-operating or collaborating individuals and groups with the expression of those values as political educational practice and an expression of i~we~i.

Conclusion

I began with the question that gave rise to this paper: How can I contribute to the flourishing of humanity as I live a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile? I explored this question through creating this multimedia narrative to communicate my meanings of collaboration and educational practice. In the process I:

- evolved my understanding of collaboration and educational practice, which are multidimensional and relationally-dynamic, and expressions of meanings of 'i am because we are' and 'we are because i am', represented as i~we~i (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2016);
- clarified how I am developing and integrating personal, professional and political educational practice, that gives meaning and purpose to my work and life, now I am no longer employed by a Local Authority as an educational psychologist;
- have deepened my understanding and practice of Living Theory research and the possibilities it offers me as a professional educational practitioner;
- developed my understanding of Living Theory research as an integration of personal, professional, political educational practice.

It has been interesting and very challenging to create this paper. I have learned more about my embodied meanings of my ontological and social values that emerged and were clarified in the course of my doctoral research and I have found they continue to serve as my explanatory principles and standards of judgment. I have also learned that going through the pain barrier of the writerly and readerly phase of Living Theory research to create a publishable account of my Living Theory research, has helped me to recognize, value and critically and creatively appraise my personal, professional and political educational practice to make it more satisfying, productive and worthwhile.

Many people have been with me in different ways on this stage of my Living Theory research journey but only some have been named. I feel uneasy about that but don't know what to do about it. I don't necessarily remember some, even when they have profoundly influenced me. How do I enable others to feel their unique contribution to making this a better world for us all has been recognized and valued?

I recognize my need to develop my skills as a researcher to progress my personal, professional and political educational practice, which includes developing to communicate accounts of my living-educational–theory research. I am also aware that, for such accounts to be of any use to anyone, I also need to raise awareness of the skills of 'reading' such accounts. As Buber (1970) wrote:

We must learn to feel addressed by a book, by the human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us. A good book or essay or poem is not primarily an object to be put to use, or an object of experience: it is the voice of You speaking to me, requiring a response. (p. 39)

So, lastly I want to ask you – do you feel I have spoken to you directly? Has anything here (no matter how microscopic or irritating) enabled you to develop your Living Theory research and enhanced your ability to recognize, value and research the integration of your personal, professional, and political educational practice to improve it and so live a more loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile?

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