

Notes (13/02/11) for Jack Whitehead's keynote presentation to the Workshop on Alternative Research Paradigms and Indigenous Knowledge Production, 14th to 17th February, 2011 in the Africa Development Centre, Covenant University, Nigeria, on:

How do I improve what I'm doing? Living Educational Theory for the African Context.

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Introduction

I wish to thank the organizers of WARP 2011 for this invitation to explore the relevance of some ideas from my research programme on action research and living educational theory for the development of the Nigerian Academic Researcher. In particular I shall be exploring the relevance of the idea of a living educational theory:

A living educational theory is an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work.

We all live in pluralistic worlds of meaning that shape our educational influences. We can call these pluralistic worlds, complex ecologies, social contexts or our cosmologies. Whatever we call them it is most important, in the generation of a living educational theory, that their influences are acknowledged. This is why I find the insights from the most advanced social theories of the day so very important in the construction of a living educational theory that acknowledges these social, environmental and cosmological influences.

The context for my presentation and exploration of the relevance of living educational theories to improving practice and generating knowledge has been provided by the following information on Covenant University and on the 2011 Workshop on Alternative Research Paradigms (WARP):

The Covenant University Context

Covenant University is a vision-birther, vision-driven University established in the footsteps of world-renowned institutions like Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Duke. As a Christian mission University, our philosophy and pillars are deep rooted in Biblical principles and are directed towards effecting a change that will advance

humanity and restore the dignity of the African.

Our vision is to raise a new generation of leaders who will be equipped to positively influence their world. We believe that leadership is the greatest need of Africa today and that a solid base of good character and life-applicable learning skills are crucial to building leaders for the African and Global context. That is why our core values of Spirituality, Possibility Mentality, Capacity Building, Integrity, Responsibility, Diligence and Sacrifice define our commitment to excellence. (Covenant University, 2011)

The Context of the Workshop on Alternative Research Paradigms (WARPP)

The need to really engage African communities has never been more urgent. Facing chronic crises of troubling proportions, African economies and communities are crippled by alarmingly poor quality of life standards and other socio-political problems. To do this, The Nigerian/African academic must embrace new research tools - however unorthodox or removed from mainstream praxis – that do not encourage complacency (the ‘publish or perish’ culture), and that help relocate him/her in the very centre of the vortex of public concerns, needs and hopes. WARP is designed to help expose the researcher to new ways of conducting research, new ways of constructing his/her identity in relation to the researched, and new ways of promoting social change. Hence, WARP exposes participants to alternative ways of perceiving the researchable world, and equips all with tools that have great transformative potential. The workshop, built on the postmodern sensitivity to the idea of plurality, is a quest to decolonize the African research situation by introducing more contextually significant approaches to knowledge production and application, and promoting indigenous knowledge systems that aid mental health, education and meaningful living.

This year’s workshop is designed to facilitate the training of participants (academics and students) in the Action Research paradigm (an approach to research that challenges traditional social science, emphasizes action, and supports social change as a legitimate research outcome), Living Educational Theory (which introduces the idea that people live in pluralistic worlds of meaning that shapes their educational influences) and the need to promote the exploration of indigenous knowledge systems in psychology and psychology-related fields.

In this keynote I shall focus on:

- i) The creation of living educational theories in exploring the implications of asking, answering and researching, action research questions of the kind, “How do ‘we~i’ improve what ‘we~i’ are doing in our professional contexts?”
- ii) Making public your embodied knowledge in your living theories as educators in higher education and engaging with the ideas of others.
- iii) The colonizing western ‘I’ and the decolonizing ‘we~i’ of African ways of being.

In asking, researching and answering such questions I ask that you bear the following words in mind from Ben Okri (1996) about the significance of stories and values. The poet and novelist was born in 1959 in Minna, northern Nigeria, to an Igbo mother and Urhobo father:

1) To poison a nation, poison its stories. A demoralised nation tells demoralised stories to itself. Beware of the story-tellers who are not fully conscious of the importance of their gifts, and who are irresponsible in the application of their art: they could unwittingly help along the psychic destruction of their people.... (p. 17)

14) Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals or nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations.

15) Nations and people are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings. (p.21)

In emphasizing the importance of your stories and values in the creation of the Nigerian Academic Researcher and in the process of decolonization, I also ask that you bear Bakhtin's (Morson & Emerson, 1989) point in mind about the importance of accepting your responsibility as an individual 'I'.

As Bakhtin explains "I" do not fit into theory - neither in the psychology of consciousness, not the history of some science, nor in the chronological ordering of my day, not in my scholarly duties..... these problems derive from the fundamental error of "rationalist" philosophy... The fatal flaw is the denial of responsibility -

which is to say, the crisis is at base an ethical one. It can be overcome only by an understanding of the act as a category into which cognition enters but which is radically singular and "responsible". (p. 13.).

Here are some thoughts on how you might exercise your responsibility as a Nigerian Academic Researcher in the creation of your own living educational theories.

1) The creation of Living Educational Theories through asking, researching and answering, action research questions of the kind, "How do 'we~i' improve what 'we~i' are doing?"

I coined the phrase 'Living Educational Theory' (Whitehead, 1989) in response to the idea that Educational Theory was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education, an approach to educational theory that became known as the disciplines approach. I felt the need for a different approach to educational research because of an assumption in the disciplines approach. This was the assumption that the practical principles I used as an educator to explain my educational influences in learning were at best pragmatic maxims that had a first crude and superficial justification in practice and that would be replaced in any rationally justified educational theory (Hirst, 1983, p. 18).

As I said earlier, in my alternative to this approach, **a living educational theory is an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work.**

In my educational research programme of the last 40 years I have focused on the creation and dissemination of living educational theories in action research enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional context?' In 1976, a group of 6 teachers I worked with on a local curriculum development into improving learning for 11-14 year olds in mixed ability groups (Whitehead, 1976) helped me to make explicit the action reflection cycles which I claim everyone here will recognise as being implicit in the ways that you work at improving what you are doing. Here is an action reflection cycle

I experience a concern or problem when some of my values are not being lived as fully as I think they could be.

I imagine possible ways of improving my practice and choose one to act on in an action plan.

I act and gather data to enable me to make a judgment on the effectiveness of my actions in relation to living my values as fully as I can.

I evaluate my actions in terms of their effectiveness and my present understandings of my context with its opportunities and constraints.

I modify my concerns, plans and actions in the light of my evaluations.

What distinguishes this process as research from a process of professional learning is where the individual produces an explanation of their educational influence in learning and submits this to a validation group for enhancing the validity of the explanation through the mutual rational controls of critical discussion. Evaluating the validity of explanation requires standards of judgment. In testing the validity of a living educational theory the standards are themselves living (Laidlaw, 1996).

You could use such an action reflection cycle in your enquiry into improving your practice with the questions:

What is my concern?

Why am I concerned?

What am I going to do about it?

What data will I gather to help me to judge my effectiveness?

How does the data help me to clarify the meanings of my embodied values as these emerge in practice?

What values-based explanatory principles do I use to explain my educational influence?

How do I use my values-based standards of judgment in evaluating the validity of my claims to be improving my practice?

How will I strengthen the validity of my values-based explanation of my educational influences in learning?

My most recent presentation on '*Accounting for Ourselves in Our Living Educational Theories*' (Whitehead, 2011) was the Foundation Hour Presentation at Liverpool Hope University on the 12th January 2011

You can see the 42:32 minute video of the actual presentation at:



<http://tinyurl.com/6j65z64>

I do hope that you will view the video as I believe that you will find that your values are consistent with both my research programme into living educational theory and the vision and purpose of the Strategic Map 2010-11 of the Faculty of Education of Liverpool Hope University, especially with its commitment to promote education as a humanizing influence and with characterizing all work with values arising from hope and love:

Vision: *The guiding vision and orientation of the Faculty is to develop educational thought and practices which promote education as a humanising influence on each person and on society locally, nationally and internationally.*

Purpose: *To contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding in all fields of education, characterising all work with values arising from hope and love. (LHU, 2010)*

In my work as a Professor in the Centre for the Child and Family at Liverpool Hope University, in the UK, I participate in a collaborative research project with Dr. Joan Walton the Director of Centre, and others, to live these values as fully as we can (see

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/cfc/cfcstrategicmap2011-12.pdf>)

We are inquiring individually and collaboratively, into "how to integrate research and practice across disciplines and between professions, to improve the wellbeing of children and young people".

It may be that some of you would like to connect with the Centre for the Child and Family to support the development of your own research.

There is one method I refer to as empathetic resonance, using visual data, that I think could be significant in the creation of your living theories where you are showing others the practical principles you use to explain what you are doing.

I was introduced to this term by Sardello, (2008: 51) who uses it to mean the resonance of the individual soul coming into resonance with the Soul of the World. (p. 13). I am using *empathetic resonance* to communicate a energy-flowing feeling of the immediate presence of the other in communicating the living values that the other experiences, as giving meaning and purpose to their life. (Whitehead, 2010b, p. 95)

For example, the video-clip below is taken of Moira Laidlaw at the end of an English lesson with some 80 students in what is now Ningxai Teachers University in China. As I move the cursor along the clip I will pause at the image below to see if your responses can strengthen the empathetic validity of the experience of Moira expressing a loving dynamic energy in her relationships with her students. Both Moira and I are agreed that we are both experiencing a flow of loving dynamic energy as we watch the video. My point is that you may need to use such visual data in communicating the meanings of your relationally dynamic energies and values in the explanatory principles you use to explain your educational influences in learning.



see - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno>

As I focus on your *core values of Spirituality, Possibility Mentality, Capacity Building, Integrity, Responsibility, Diligence and Sacrifice*, I am wondering if, in your work and research, you might also be expressing love and hope and whether these could and should be brought into the explanatory principles you use to explain your educational influences in learning.

Professor Jean McNiff, in her keynote to 2011 WARP, will be focusing on the transformative power of action research and why it is needed in African contexts today. If you access Jean's web-site at <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/> and click on the Worldwide section, you can access reports on her support for action research in Kayelitsha, Israel and Qatar. Click on Qatar and you can access the Teacher Enquiry Bulletin edited by Jean on '*Action Research for Teachers in Qatar*'. For anyone who wishes to develop an action research approach to improving practice and generating knowledge I do advise you to look at the importance of the initial generative processes in action research that are so well understood by Jean. If you move from the initial phases of action research into the generation of your own living educational theory I think you will find inspiration in Jean's '*My Story Is My Living Educational Theory*' (McNiff, 2009). I cannot emphasise enough the importance of making public your living educational theory. It is your claims to know in your enquiry, made public, that distinguish your enquiries as research and I shall now focus on this issue.

2) Making public your embodied knowledge in your living theories as educators in higher education and engaging with the living theories of others.

You can make public your embodied knowledge through e-forums such at the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS). By clicking on <http://ejolts.net/> you can access the living theories of practitioner-researchers from all around the world. Here are the contents of the latest issue with contributions from Germany, Ireland, the UK and Turkey:

Contents of EJOLTS: December 2010, Volume 3, Issue 2

Foreword (pp.i-ii)

Margaret Farren

How can I improve my communication with my sister, so that I can lead a more loving, consistent and harmonious life with her? A personal action research inquiry into family-displacement in the former eastern zone and as a symbol of the reunification of Germany (pp. 119-169)

Anke Jauch

How do I enhance motivation to learn and higher order cognition among students of Science through the use of a virtual learning environment? (pp.170-192)

Mary McMahon

Exploring an extended role for coaching – through the eyes of an action researcher (pp.193-211)

Jacqueline J. Scholes-Rhodes

How to improve the society-service course: Early childhood education teacher-candidates' experiences in the project "Do you want to be a child for one-day?" (pp. 212-234)

Hatice Zeynep Inan

For those of you who wish to work with students and pupils as co-researchers I do urge you to access the paper by Branko Bogнар and Marica Zovko (2008) on Pupils as action researchers: improving something important in our lives at <http://ejolts.net/node/82> .

As I am speaking the embodied knowledge which practitioner-researchers around the world have made public is flowing through us in space. You can access some of the doctoral theses flowing through you at this moment by

clicking on:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>

Just browsing down the list of titles, you will see that many of the researchers have included 'I' within their enquiries. No one has included 'we~i' within their title (I am grateful to Yaqub Murray who introduced me to this notation of 'we~I', whilst the meaning is my own). If you felt it desirable you could engage in collaborative or cooperative research with others in your 'we~i' relationships as you work and research to improve your practice and generate knowledge. You could make your living theories freely available in the global flow of our e-communications and develop a distinctive contribution to educational theory of knowledge for the Nigerian Academic Researcher.

Here are some thoughts on how you might exercise your responsibility as a Nigerian Academic Researcher by decolonizing the western 'I' with the 'we~i' of African ways of being.

3) The colonizing western 'I' and the decolonizing 'we~i' of African ways of being.

This year's OpenSpace problem focus at our 2011 WARP workshop is 'Reimagining the Identity and Work of the Nigerian Academic Researcher'. I am suggesting that part of this transformation in identity could focus on the relational or 'we~i' qualities of African ways of being influenced by Ubuntu. Nelson Mandela is perhaps the most famous of Africans and he acknowledges the importance of an Ubuntu way of being that translates into English as 'I am because we are'. In much academic writing that has been influenced by a western epistemology the 'I' is often thought of as an autonomous individual, as if the individual were somehow separated from its context. The dominant logic of theories in Western Academies continues to be influenced by Aristotle's law of contradiction that eliminates contradictions between statements from correct thought. The idea of 'I' as an autonomous and discrete being together with a logic that eliminates contradictions between statements, continues to dominate Western Academies and has had a colonizing influence in Universities in Africa.

I am suggesting that the reimagining of the identity and work of the Nigerian Academic Researcher could rest on the development of living educational theories from exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering action research questions of the kind, "How do 'we~i' improve what 'we~i' are doing?"

I now wish to draw your attention to three doctorates on the web that I think will repay a careful reading.

The first doctorate is Snoek Desmond's (2010) *'A journey in family literacy: Investigation into influences on the development of an approach to family literacy.'* at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/southafrica/SnoeksDesmondphdopt.pdf>

The Family Literacy Project in this study is situated in deeply rural KwaZulu Natal, where the existing extensive knowledge base is almost exclusively oral, and informed by well established insights, understandings and values. In this context, I have examined the roles of families, adult literacy and early childhood development to establish their impact on the development of literacy in families. (Abstract)

Desmond's thesis emphasizes the importance of the relational dynamic of families and their indigenous knowledge in the development of family literacy within an African rural community with a strong oral tradition in the communication of knowledge.

The second doctorate is Eden Charles' (2007) Ph.D. on '*How Can I bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard Of Judgment Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition.*' at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/edenphd.shtml>

In Section Three on the '*Influence of an African Cosmology with Ubuntu*' Charles shows his use of art in sustaining a commitment to his humanizing values at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/edenphd/section3.pdf>

In Section 6 on '*Me as Consultant*' at

<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/edenphd/section6.pdf>

Charles explains in a video-clip the humanizing influence in his own learning of working with women who have been violated in the civil war in Sierra Leone:



In this clip I am recounting an experience from a working trip to Sierra Leone to my research supervisor, Jack Whitehead. I went not long after the end of the devastating civil war there. I think that this clip contains something of the living dynamic of my Ubuntu way of being. I am speaking about people who have gone through the most horrific of experiences and who will live with the consequences of that for the rest of their lives. I am not dwelling on the horror of the tragedy of that civil war, even though I am visibly moved by it. Instead I am praising the humanity of the women rather than condemning or dwelling on the evils. I am also demonstrating my connection with the women in Sierra Leone and seeing, feeling themselves as part of me. Despite living and working in Europe I feel and not just

understand the oneness of our condition. My values of humanity, my ontological and political urges are provoked and I am filled with generative passion to engage in work that can bring about a better situation. I carry this spirit into my work as a consultant in which I see it as a site for being a positive influence on restorative processes of reidentification characterised and enabled by a guiltless recognition.
(Section 6)

In my visits to Africa I have been impressed by the spontaneous expressions of life-affirming energy in welcoming the other, in dance and in music. I don't want to underestimate the importance of including such expressions of life-affirming energy in one's explanations of educational influence in reimagining the identity of the Nigerian Academic Researcher. Here is a moment in our conversation which Eden evokes a flow of such life-affirming energy through me.



The third doctorate is Graham van Tuyl's Ph.D. (2009) *From engineer to co-creative catalyst; an inclusional and transformational journey. An inquiry into the epistemology of how traditional management 'tools and theory' can be used and evolved in enhancing organizational effectiveness in an industrial setting, and how to value and evaluate change:*

This thesis demonstrates through the narrative of my personal journey how being an Engineer and a Co-Creative Catalyst in generating organizational change can be an inclusional and transformational journey. Co-Creative Catalyst(s) use their own professional and personal values to help generate a creative space at the 'Edge of Fluidity', a space of embodied and emergent viewpoints on what change should be. This thesis will demonstrate how an inclusional practice can be used to help create change, whilst also demonstrating that current economic practice needs to be understood as a fundamentally important barrier to fluidity of ideas across boundaries. This thesis demonstrates how inclusional change can incorporate social, technical as well as economic models to be truly sustainable.

I know that many of you are interested in making an economic contribution to the future of Nigeria. Van Tuyl explains how he engages with economic realities,

with integrity, through his action research in making such a contribution in a different context, from within the oil industry. You can access his thesis from the living theory section of <http://www.actionresearch.net>. Van Tuyl embraces Rayner's (2011) idea of inclusionality, which is a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries. You can access a 40 minute video of Rayner talking to a set of powerpoint slides, prepared for a keynote for a Conference in Vienna in 2010, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA3Hsvzig5Y>. You can also access Alan Rayner's talks on inclusionality at:

<http://people.bath.ac.uk/bssadmr/inclusionality/>

If you are interested in the epistemological significance of creating your living educational theories from 'we~i' I do advise you to focus on the use of visual data in communicating the meanings of inclusional ways of being. For example, in the following clip I am working with a group from the Children's Service of Bath and North East Somerset in the UK. In this clip I am showing the group the use of the video-data to communicate the meanings of the embodied energy and values that they express in their practice. The video-clip is also showing our inclusional ways of being with the expression of our life-affirming energy.

To develop relationally dynamic representations of your practice and your explanations of your educational influences in 'we~I' relationships, I am suggesting that you will need to develop your multi-media skills as researchers and explore the significance of empathetic resonance with each other in the communication of the expression of the meanings of your values.



see - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHuZqFPYp48>

To conclude I want to emphasise the importance of the OpenSpace side-event later this week in which the organizers intend that we contribute to the creation of a decentred arena for the free critique of assumptions about issues and positions pertinent to the Workshop discourse. They hope that we will integrate participant-learning processes into our workshop format to help to perpetuate discourse after the Workshop is concluded. Here are six forums that you could contribute to in helping to sustain our conversations.

- 1) The Practitioner-Researcher e-forum - you can join this at: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?SUBED1=practitioner-researcher&A=1>
- 2) The Action Research Africa Network at <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?SUBED1=ARAN&A=1>
- 3) The LivingLearning space at: <http://www.livinglearning.org.uk/>
- 4) Presenting at the DIVERSE (Developing Innovative Visual Educational Resources for Students Everywhere), June 28-30, 2011 at Dublin City University, see: <http://diverse2011.dcu.ie/welcome.html>. See also Dr. Margaret Farren's website at <http://www.margaretfarren.mattol.net/> and Yvonne Crotty's video-linking to education web-site at <http://web.me.com/yvonnecrotty/Videolinked/home.html>
- 5) Submitting your accounts of your research to the Journal of Interactive Media in Education (JIME) at <http://jime.open.ac.uk/>
- 6) Submitting your explanation of your educational influence in contributing to the development of the Nigerian Academic Researcher in EJOLTS at <http://ejolts.net/>

I want to thank once again the organizers of WARP 2011 for offering me the opportunity to attend and to share ideas on the significance of creating your living educational theories for the development of the Nigerian Academic Researcher. I am looking forward very much to continuing to share our ideas over the course of the Workshop and then in some sustained and sustaining educational conversations over the coming years. Thank you.

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