

# Educational Research for Social Change

An online academic journal of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

ISSN 2221-4070

**Vol. 1 no. 1 April 2012**

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## Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 1 no. 1

April 2012

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

Managing Editor & Language Editor: Dr Ann Smith

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**Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)**

**Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012**

**pp. 1-4**

**[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)**

**ISSN: 2221-4070**

## **Editorial**

### **Action Research: Its Transformative Potential**

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This inaugural issue of the Educational Research for Social Change Journal aims to tap into research which draws on participatory and emancipatory paradigms and methodologies in engaging communities in research towards social change. This special issue on action research, with the theme, Action Research: Its transformative potential, arose out of a conference that was held at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in August 2010, with the above title as its theme. The conference was organised to bring together South African and international educational researchers to share their learning around action research. It was hoped that such networking would provide expanded opportunities for researchers, students and practising teachers to conduct action research for social and educational improvement.

The articles chosen for this issue from the conference papers submitted are evidence of the burgeoning interest in action research in education circles. They also clearly illustrate the transformative potential of action research. Since action research is a broad term, that is open to many different interpretations, let me position it within the scope of this journal, whose aim is to promote research for social change, research that makes a real difference in the lives of both participants and researchers.

There has been a tremendous increase in the literature produced around action research in recent years (Dick, 2011). However, the term "action research" has been used and understood in many different ways – up to 24 different versions of participative, action-oriented research were identified by one researcher, in one context (Narayansamy, 2009). Add to this the different approaches to action research, such as critical action research (Davis, 2008), participatory action research (Jordan, 2008), community-based action research (Stringer, 2007) and living educational theory (Whitehead, 2008), and one can be forgiven for becoming confused. It is therefore important that I position action research in terms of its link to the focus of this journal - educational research for social change.

In spite of the plethora of action research approaches, certain key epistemological, ontological, methodological and axiological principles apply to them all. The overarching paradigm of all action research is grounded in definite, non-negotiable values and ideologies that underpin an inclusive and dynamic worldview. It is supported by constructivist and critical theories that allow for multiple ways to interpret reality. Educational improvement arises out of critical reflection of the status quo, followed by a definite plan to action. Common values that promote the social good give direction to the choice of research design and process, and include, inter alia, democracy, respect, equality, promotion of quality of life for all (Stringer, 2007), and authentic collaboration (Piggot-Irvine, 2012). In a practitioner self-enquiry approach,



participants foreground ontological values that then become standards by which they can judge their intentions and actions (Whitehead, 2008).

Action research promotes democracy and abolishes the notion of the all-knowing, all-powerful academic “expert” through the recognition that knowledge is context-bound, created in collaboration with others and that interpretations are fluid and changing (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Participants are regarded as practitioner-researchers, perfectly capable of finding workable ways to improve their own educational situations. The role of the academic researcher is therefore to guide the participants to take responsibility for their own thinking, attitudes and actions (Wood, Morar & Mostert, 2008) since shifts on a cognitive, affective and behavioural level are more likely to be sustained as they become part of the personal and professional identity of the participant (Batagiannis, 2011).

Action research has been described as being more concerned with practice than theory (Townsend, 2010), but I would challenge the validity of such a claim. Action research allows for the creation of unique and personal “living theories” (Whitehead, 1989, p. 43) that generate knowledge that can influence educational practice and research in a significant way (see [www.actionresearch.net](http://www.actionresearch.net) for many examples of doctoral theses and links to articles).

Action research leads to transformation of the circumstances but, in the process, the participant-researchers are also transformed. Increase in self-confidence and self-awareness, improvement in problem solving ability and development of a desire and capacity for lifelong learning (Zuber-Skerrit, 2011) are all outcomes that have been ascribed to participation in an action research process. Hope and a growing agency to take control of their own situations is also noted in literature (Schoen, 2007). Transformation is thus enhanced on three levels:

- Practical outcomes: transformation in social circumstances/improvement in educational concern;
- Epistemological outcomes: transformation in how people think about research, about knowledge creation and what counts as valid educational theory; and
- Ontological outcomes: transformation of ways of living, how we interact with others, how we see our position in the world.

Action research is aimed at improving lives by “bringing scholarship and praxis back together ... our immodest aim is to change the relationship between knowledge and practice ... usually practised by scholar-practitioners who care deeply about making a positive change in the world” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.12). And that is the bottom line – to bring about social, educational and personal improvement. For research to make a real difference, to contribute to continual and growth-enhancing learning in our own lives and in the lives of those we influence, we need to continually self-reflect on what we are doing, and why we are doing it.

Any theory that attempts to improve social problems needs to be dynamic, able to change and evolve. Living educational theory is a notion, first mooted by Jack Whitehead (1989), that is being adopted by academics and practitioners in South Africa and worldwide as a feasible way to engage in teaching and research that is truly transformational (Wood, Morar & Mostert, 2007). Action research is in a constantly developmental state: action researchers “should stress the importance of developing new forms of explanation rather than permitting their research to be dominated by method or by traditional forms of theoretical, conceptual frameworks” (Whitehead, 1989, p.42). The main questions that should be posed by all action researchers to validate their work are: “Do I accept and live out my values as fully as I can?” and “Are these values acceptable and useful for others in promoting transformation in educational practice?” (McNiff, 2005, p. 24). Most of the contributors to this issue have chosen to use a living theory approach to educational enquiry. In his global overview of this genre of action research, **Jack Whitehead** provides us

with ideas on how researchers can contribute to “a new epistemology for educational research” and ample examples from all over the world that serve as evidence that this is an approach to research that is helping to transform education.

**Mark Schofield’s** focus is on using action research within the tertiary curriculum as a theoretical base for helping professionals enrolled on Master’s programmes to improve their work practices. Through this module, he engages participants in reflecting on their own practice and deciding what model or aspects of action research would be most appropriate for their context. In this way, they learn how to improve their practices by working collaboratively, democratically and transformatively. Schofield positions his module as a tool that supports professional development and transferrable learning that encourages students to reflexively engage with the world to bring about mutual transformation.

Also focusing on teaching practices at tertiary level, **Lee Scott** shares her living theory of how visual prompts can be used to enhance student learning. She explains how she came to know that learning is promoted through the introduction of “play” in the classroom. Her “zig-zag” description of the research process aptly captures the iterative nature of learning inherent in the action research process.

Moving to research within a school context, **Linda Vargas** (together with Demi Fernandez) explores the use of flamenco dance as a means of educational and personal development within a multicultural context. Her account of how she discovered the value of dance as a means of encouraging cognitive, affective and behavioural transformation in learners towards a more socially just way of life has important implications for the task of “nation building” in South Africa.

**Deirdre Kroone** (under the supervision of Busisiwe Alant) explains how her values of honesty, integrity and concern about the well-being of her learners spurred her on to embark on a journey to find out how she could best influence healthy food choices among youth. As is common in action research, the findings were not exactly what she expected. True to the “zig-zag” nature of the process as described by Scott above, she found out things that indicated that she was a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989) and she needed to face and resolve this. While her article does not offer definite answers to the main research question, it does demonstrate the value of the flexible and dynamic design of action research that allows for the unearthing of hidden barriers to growth and transformation.

Finally, **Bonnie Kaplan** explains how adopting an action research approach to continually assess her coaching and mentoring work with emerging entrepreneurs has transformed her practice. Her desire to help people to attain economic independence stems from her passion to eradicate social and economic injustice. Her narrative describes how her personal journey of transformation influenced the transformation of her students and their social circumstances.

The “post-modern” stage of South African education creates uncertainty about how to attain social and educational sustainability (Gaylard, 2005). However, such a situation can be an opportunity for creativity, rather than despair. Action research encourages creativity, helping practitioners to find ways of improving their work which often entails rejection of current social and educational norms and the development of new ways to approach the problems facing them. In short, the process of conducting action research transforms educators and education, leading inevitably to a transformative influence on society. I would like to end by quoting from the book that is reviewed in this issue (see page 98-99):

That is why PALAR [participatory action learning and action research] has an important role to play not only as method or methodology, but also as an epistemology, ontology and ethical character/community building framework. (Zuber-Skerrit, 2012, p. 2)

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Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012

pp. 5-21

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

## Educational Research for Social Change with Living Educational Theories

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### Abstract

This position paper explains how African educational researchers could contribute to a new epistemology for educational knowledge. It is focused on those researchers who are willing to research and explain their educational influences in enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" in the social contexts in which they live and work. Such explanations are called living educational theories to distinguish the explanations from those *derived* from the conceptual abstractions of traditional theories. The African concept of *ubuntu* is used with the digital technologies of multimedia narratives to explain how educational researchers for social change can create their own living educational theories that carry hope for the future of humanity. The global significance of the ideas in this editorial commentary is contextualised with research from China, India, Europe, Canada, Japan, USA, Tasmania and South Africa.

**Keywords:** Living Educational Theories; Action Research; Ubuntu; Self-Study; Living Theory.

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### Background

The National Research Foundation of South Africa has funded a three-year (2011–14) Transformative Education/al Studies Project with the generic question, "How do I transform my professional practice as ...?"

In this project, educators/postgraduate students in Higher Education will reflect critically on their learning, teaching, assessment, curriculum and/or educational professional practice in a variety of ways with the multiple benefits of improving the quality of their practice, earning the award of a senior degree and earning research outputs in the form of publications. This will simultaneously impact positively on the quality and rate of under and post graduate throughput and research outputs (TES, 2010).

**Educational Research for Social Change, April 2012, 1 (1)**

**Faculty of Education: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa**



Participants and lead investigators in this project have submitted a successful proposal to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) for presentation at the 2012 AERA Conference. The symposium title is *Starting With Ourselves: Perspectives from the Transformative Education/al Studies Project* and the abstract states:

Higher Education in South Africa is characterised by a range of challenges. The Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) project brings into dialogue a number of practitioner-research studies that respond to these challenges. The overarching research question – ‘How do I transform my education/al practice as ....?’ – is adapted for each participant’s educational context, giving rise to a range of responses and insights. This symposium will provide an opportunity to engage with a variety of participant perspectives from the TES project. The objectives of the session are to make public education/al knowledge engendered by the TES project and to illustrate how participation in the *process* of this self-study of practice research project actually changes its practitioners and their education/al practice and contexts.

The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA) ran a special interest group (SIG) for action research and self-study from 30 November to 2 December 2011 and this is how it has been described in correspondence to the Action Research Africa Network:

This SIG focuses on all aspects of Action Research and Self-Study as a practitioner-research approach which addresses social and educational issues. This group already networks via three jisc mails, namely Action Research Africa Network [aran@jiscmail.ac.uk], Practitioner-Researcher [practitioner-researcher@jiscmail.ac.uk], and Transformative Educational Studies Masters and Doctoral Studies [transformativeeducation-alstudy@jiscmail.ac.uk]. The annual SIG meeting at HELTASA meeting will be used for face-to-face interaction to enhance the relationships and practice forged digitally throughout the year, and to plan for the year following. The above commitments of South African educational researchers to contribute to social change and transformation in relation to the public good is clearly related to the transformations in South African society with the new constitution coming into law in 1996. This commitment is consistent with both the mission of AERA and the objectives of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) in that both focus on improving practice and serving the public good.

AERA seeks to:

advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good. (Ball & Tyson, 2011).

BERA seeks to:

encourage the pursuit of educational research and its application for both the improvement of educational practice and for the public benefit (BERA, 2010).

Ball & Tyson (2011) make the point that educational researchers have fulfilled the first part of the AERA mission to advance knowledge about education and to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education. They say that educational researchers have been less vigilant and less effective, however, in fulfilling the

second part of the mission: to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good.

In this paper I am suggesting that the research by contributors to the Transformative Education/al Studies Project, because they are formed as “I” problems, together with the use of multimedia narrative and the most advanced social theories of the day to share meanings of the relational dynamics of ubuntu, will do much to fulfil both parts of the AERA mission: advancing knowledge about education to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education and promoting research to improve education and serve the public good. To make my case I (Whitehead, 2012) include references to the work of Eden Charles (2007), Ian Phillips (2011), Linda Vargas (2010) and Anat Geller (2010). My purpose in including these references is not to signal their agreement with the ideas in this paper. Rather, it is to emphasise the importance of their own creativity and originality in generating their own living educational theories for social change.

## **The Genesis of Creating Living Educational Theories with Living-theory Methodologies and Action Research**

The genesis of living educational theories with living-theory methodologies emerged from my research programme into the nature of educational theory at the University of Bath between 1973 and 2009. In 1973 I moved to the University of Bath from my position as Head of the Science Department at Erkenwald Comprehensive School in the East End of London to see if I could contribute to the development of valid forms of educational theory. The transformation in my vocation from being a science teacher to being an educational researcher was prompted by a mistake in the then-dominant disciplines approach to educational theory. The mistake in this approach was the belief that the explanatory principles an individual used to elucidate their educational influences in their own and pupils’ learning were at best pragmatic maxims that had a crude and superficial justification in practice that would be replaced in any rationally developed theory by principles with more theoretical justification (Hirst 1983, p.18).

In the first lesson I taught as a new teacher in 1967 I found myself saying to myself, “I’ve got to do this better” and “How can I improve what I am doing?” On moving to the University of Bath in 1973 I decided to explore the implications of asking, researching and answering my question, “How do I improve what I am doing?” for the construction of valid explanations of my educational influence in my own learning and in the learning of others. I later added my educational influence of the social formations in which I live and work to the explanation. The transformation in my educational epistemology from that of a positivist and empirical scientist, influenced by my first degree in physical sciences, followed from the nature of the question. The “I” in the question existed as a living contradiction in the sense of holding together the values I wished to live as fully as possible, together with their negation.

I first saw myself as a living contradiction during the 1971–2 academic year when the Inspectorate in Barking provided me with a video camera to explore its potential as an educational aid in the Science Department. On turning the camera on myself in one of my science lessons I could see that I was not doing what I believed that I was doing. I believed that I had established enquiry learning in my classroom in the sense that I was responding to questions asked by the pupils. The video showed me that I was actually organising learning resources with predefined questions that I was encouraging my pupils to ask. From this experience of existing as a living contradiction I found myself imagining what I could do to establish enquiry learning, I acted on my plan, evaluated my actions in terms of my pupils’ learning and modified my actions in the light of my evaluations. At the time I did not explicate what I later came to understand as the action reflection cycles of an action researcher. The explication came later (Whitehead, 1976) in a project with six teachers on improving learning for 11–14-year-olds in mixed-ability groups, and in my first presentation to a BERA Conference (Whitehead, 1977).

My idea of creating living educational theories, as the explanations that individuals create for their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of others, came from a question asked by the Soviet logician Eward Ilyenkov (1977) when he asked, "If an object exists as a living contradiction what must the thought be (statement) that expresses it?"

I liked the idea of creating a living educational theory from an exploration of the implications of asking, researching and answering the question, "How do I improve what I am doing?" in which the "I" existed as a living contradiction.

From my studies of logic I understood the 2,500-year-old arguments between dialectical and propositional thinkers in which proponents of the different epistemologies often denied the rationality of the other's position. The arguments focused on the academic legitimacy of including a contradiction in correct thought. Aristotle developed a law of contradiction which stated that two mutually exclusive statements cannot be true simultaneously. Plato, in his dialogues on poetic inspiration, and through the words of Socrates, explained that a dialectician could hold both the One and the Many together. Popper (1963, p. 315) claimed that the reasoning of dialecticians, with the nucleus of contradiction, was based on nothing better than a loose and woolly way of speaking that was entirely useless in theory. Marcuse (1964, p. 111) claimed that propositional logic conceals the dialectical nature of reality with its nucleus of contradiction. Rayner (2011) has offered an inclusional logic that can embrace and draw insights from the meanings of dialectical and propositional thinkers without denying the rationality of dialectical and propositional thought but by acknowledging some limitations in their ways of making sense of the world (Whitehead & Rayner, 2009).

To avoid the limitations of communicating meanings using words alone, from within either propositional or dialectical ways of thinking, while benefitting from some insights of both ways of thinking, I shall focus on visual narratives of educational practices that include both visual data and interpretations using words.

## **Educational Research for Social Change with Living Educational Theories using Visual Narratives**

In creating a living educational theory individuals must be prepared to be accountable to themselves and others in terms of the values and understandings that give meaning and purpose to their lives. In this sense, the values are ontological in that they are intimately related to who one believes oneself to be. Clarifying and evolving the meanings of these values involves their embodied expression in enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" It involves their clarification and evolution in the course of their emergence in practice in action reflection cycles. What I mean by this is that the values are offered as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning as one expresses concerns, creates action plans, acts and gathers data to make a judgment on the effectiveness of the actions, and evaluates and modifies the concerns plans and actions in the light of the evaluations.

I like Noffke's (1997) criticism of living educational theories because it serves as a reminder to engage one's values of humanity with the social formations in which we live and work. Noffke believes that the processes of self-awareness in the creation of living educational theories are vital in identifying the contradictions between one's espoused theories and one's practices. Noffke is critical of the focus on individual learning as she says that this only begins to address the social basis of personal belief systems. She accepts that such efforts can further a kind of collective agency but claims, mistakenly in my view, that it is a sense of agency built on ideas of society as a collection of autonomous individuals. As such, Noffke says, 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. Noffke claims that 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 (p. 329).

In creating a living educational theory in enquiries of the kind, “How do I improve what I am doing?” it is wise to bear in mind the importance of engaging with the social formations that influence one’s practice and the importance of the idea of methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001) in recognising the creativity of the practitioner-researcher in engaging with social formations. What Dadds and Hart mean by methodological inventiveness is that practitioner-researchers create their own unique way through their self-chosen research focus (p. 166). They say that:

more important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage of practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care (p. 169).

What this means for the creation of a living educational theory is that the individual researcher does not simply apply anyone else’s methodological approach to their enquiry. They create their own unique living-theory methodology in the course of the enquiry and in generating their explanation of their educational influence.

To show you what I mean by both methodological inventiveness and the importance of visual narratives for communicating the meanings of the embodied values that are expressed in practice and form explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence, I shall first focus on a three-and-a-half-minute video clip in which I am talking about *ubuntu* at a workshop at the University of the Free State in South Africa on February 28, 2006.

**Video Clip 1: Jack Whitehead talking about Ubuntu at a workshop at the University of the Free State in South Africa** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkKyeT0osz8>



As can be seen in the video I am focusing on a chapter by Peter Beets and Trevor van Louw (2005) entitled “Education Transformation Assessment and Ubuntu in South Africa”. I am pointing out some of the limitations of using only words on pages of text to communicate the meanings of the expression of embodied values. If you download the clip and move the cursor backwards and forwards I believe that you will experience an empathetic resonance with my expression of a life-affirming energy as I communicate my understandings of *ubuntu*. I am thinking of *ubuntu* as a relational way of being in which one’s own identity is recognised as being intimately related to others’. Huxtable (2009) has gone into more detail into the use of video in this way to clarify the meanings of the expression of embodied values. The value of adding visual data to communications of meanings using text alone can also be appreciated through the videos and texts of three keynotes I have presented in Norway, Nigeria and the USA (Whitehead 2011a, 2011b, 2008) in which I draw attention to the importance of including visual data with text in

communicating the meanings of energy-flowing values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The latest notes of the keynote from Norway, with the video of the presentation, can be accessed at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jw16-11-11bergen2011.pdf>.

## Living Educational Theories from Others' Research

I now want to focus on the living educational theories of other individuals who have expressed their methodological inventiveness in generating their own explanations of their educational influence. I want to stress that while each individual has acknowledged the usefulness of insights drawn from my own research, their creative and critical responses to their own practice and the ideas of others have resulted in original contributions to knowledge. In drawing on the work of these individuals I am not suggesting that they agree with the ideas in this particular paper. Rather, I am focusing on their work as they acknowledge using some of my ideas in making their own original contributions to educational knowledge.

My choice of the doctoral, living educational theories of Charles (2007) and Phillips (2011) below is because they focus on establishing *ubuntu* as a living standard of judgment in the Academy. My choice of Vargas's (2010) Masters dissertation on the flamenco dance as educational is because of the context of the research in South African primary schools and its response to issues raised in a multicultural learning environment. It also serves to emphasise the importance of the creative arts in engaging with such issues. My choice of Geller's (2011) Ed.D. dissertation, "Becoming a Better Dialogical Educator" is because of the global significance of learning how to sustain dialogues in contexts of conflict, through sustaining a commitment to values that carry hope for the future of humanity through living boundaries.

My reason for including extracts from the abstracts from the MA and Ed.D dissertations and PhD theses is that much time, effort and reflection has gone into the abstracts so that they are as clear as possible about the contribution to knowledge being made by each individual's living educational theory.

## How Can I Bring *Ubuntu* as a Living Standard of Judgement into the Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation through Societal Reidentification and Guiltless Recognition

Abstract of PhD Submission to the University of Bath, 2007 by Eden Charles, graduated 28 June 2007:

This is a living-theory thesis which traces my engagement in seeking answers to my question that focuses on how I can improve my practice as someone seeking to make a transformational contribution to the position of people of African origin. In the course of my enquiry I have recognised and embraced *Ubuntu*, as part of an African cosmology, both as my living practice and as a living standard of judgement for this thesis. It is through my *Ubuntu* way of being, enquiring and knowing that my original contribution to knowledge has emerged ... Visual narratives are used to represent and help to communicate the inclusional meanings of these living standards of judgement. The narratives are focused on my work as a management consultant and include my work with Black managers. They explain my educational influence in creating and sustaining the Sankofa Learning Centre for Black young people in London. They include my living as a Black father seeking to remain present and of value to my son within a dominant discourse/context in which this is a contradiction to the prevalent stereotype (Charles, 2007).



### **My Emergent African Great Story: “Living I” as Naturally Including Neighbourhood, Embodying An Audacious Valuing Social Living Pedagogy and Imagining The Universe Luminously, as an Energetic Inclusion of Darkness Throughout Light And Light In Darkness**

In answering Schön’s call for a new epistemology for new scholarship, my contribution is an emergent African Voice reaching out to the academic and non-academic, African and non-African alike, for the fullest co-creative possibilities. It informs on my valuing social living pedagogy, comprising ‘a unique purposeful recognition, an enhanced relational mutuality and an engaging dialogical praxis’. These dynamic relational standards of judgement are at the heart of my ‘Emergent African Great Story’, created and presented, as if using a dynamic loom (consisting of my theoretical lenses) to create a traditional African Cloth.

Included are Whitehead's living educational theory, Cooperider's Appreciative Inquiry and Marshall's Living Life as Inquiry, together with my own storytelling that affirm the African Voice in my professional practice. However, also revealed is ‘stuckness’ in my receptivity, responsiveness and reflexivity (Phillips, 2011).

### **“Out The Box: Flamenco Dance As Educational.” A Living-theory Study Of Dance In Primary Education**

The diversity of cultures found in many urban schools that I visited, presents a tremendous challenge for educators wishing to include dance into their learning programmes. As a result dance is either not being offered at these schools or is approached in a tokenistic way. In many instances the teachers I spoke to were inadequately trained or ignorant of the requirements for dance in the formal curriculum. This study seeks to offer a way to address these issues.

In my research, I have reflected on some of the educational and social factors that I believe are challenging dance education in these schools. I have conducted a Qualitative Action Research with an Auto Ethnographic, Self-Study approach using the Living-theory Methodology as a point of departure (Vargas 2010).

### **Within Dialogue And Without: How Has “Being In The Unknown” Become a Value in my Developing as a Better Dialogical Educator?**

This is an autobiographical study using a Living-theory Action Research methodology supported strongly by storytelling and visual data as a means of analysing, illustrating and generating a living educational theory concerning the attributes ‘good enough’ (Winnicott, 1965:140-152) dialogical educators might strive for in light of the Buberian ‘I–Thou’ dialogical encounters (Buber, 1955).

This thesis is concerned with ‘I’ as an early childhood pedagogy instructor, an Israeli Jew from a Hebrew-speaking culture, working mainly in three educational frameworks in three cultures: firstly, an Israeli-Arab college which is predominately Muslim; secondly, as director of a course for Druze care-givers on the occupied Golan Heights; and, thirdly, as pedagogy instructor in an academic Teachers’ Training College that is affiliated with the Zionist Kibbutz movement, servicing the multicultural and multinational sectors of the Israeli society (Geller, 2011).

## **Contextualising the global significance of the ideas in the paper with research from China, India, Europe, Canada, Japan, USA, Tasmania and South Africa and co-operative values**

In advocating the generation of living educational theories by South African educational researchers who are committed to researching their own influences in social change, I want to explain how such explanations could be contributing to a global movement of social transformation. I am thinking of a transformation that is being guided by a commitment to live as fully as possible values and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity. The success of the transformation is dependent upon individuals researching their own practice and offering public explanations for their educational influences as they explore the implications of working to live their values as fully as they can. It is dependent on our learning to share our enquiries within international cooperation.

International years are declared by the United Nations to draw attention to and encourage action on major issues. The International Year of Cooperatives 2012 is intended to raise public awareness of the invaluable contributions of cooperative enterprises to poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration.

Maureen Breeze (2011) is the joint president of the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education. In her guest editorial for the special issue of the *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, "Transforming education through co-operation – A force for change", she makes the point that values are culturally referenced. She explains that the values framework that has grounded her life is that articulated by the International Co-operative Alliance in its 1995 Statement on the Co-operative Identity. These values are focused on the six organisational values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity and the four ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Interpreting these from an educational perspective provides Breeze with a language to explore her motives and actions and scaffold her reflection.

I recognise these values of co-operative activities and relationships in the narratives from the following international contexts. I am suggesting that we learn how to hold ourselves and each other accountable for living these values as fully as we can in our educational research for social change with living educational theories. Walton (2011a, 2011b) has explored the implications of living such values in creating living educational theories in both collaborative and contexts of higher education. I do urge you to read "A Living-theory Approach to Higher Education" (Walton, 2011c).

### *China*

From China there are the living theories generated by contributors to China's Experimental Centre for Educational Action Research in Foreign Languages Teaching. The centre was opened in December 2003, and is hosted at Ningxia Teachers' University. The present curriculum in China advocates task-based approaches to teaching and learning, a radical transformation from the traditional modes of didactic teaching. It requires greater flexibility and creativity from teachers and students. Researchers in the Centre are evolving a form of action research they call "Collaborative Living Educational Theory Action Research with Chinese Characteristics".

At <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/moira.shtml> you will find two teaching methodology handbooks, copyright belonging to the Centre, but which you are welcome to use if you want. There is also a short guide to action research by Dean Tian Fengjun, Director of the Centre, and Moira Laidlaw, a life Professor at Ningxia Teachers' University with a Friend of China award. At <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/moira/mllect1.htm> you can access "Developing Educational

Methodologies through a Living-theory Approach to Action Research”, Laidlaw's inaugural lecture presented at the Longdong Institute, Gansu Province, China in 2004.

### *India*

From India there is the living-theory of Swaroop Rawal's (2006) PhD thesis, “The role of drama in enhancing life skills in children with specific learning difficulties in a Mumbai school: My reflective account”. Rawal's thesis is a reflective account of an action research project set in a drama classroom. It is a multi-voiced patchwork text which is created and built imaginatively to re-present her students and her experience in the drama classroom. The thesis explores the implications of asking, researching and answering the questions “How can drama be used to enhance life skills in children with specific learning disabilities studying in a school in Mumbai?” and “How can I improve my practice?” This research is concerned with a teacher's capacity to recognise and realise the opportunity of an alternate reality in teaching.

Rawal is explicit about the values she holds herself accountable for living as fully as she can in enhancing the reality of loving and caring for the students. This includes the reality of an empathetic, compassionate, just and democratic classroom. As a drama teacher Rawal sees drama as tool for education. She sees drama as a natural vehicle for explorative and experiential learning. Rawal investigates the influences of action research on her practice and the impact of engaging in the stages of action research which provided her with a methodical structure for implementing and analysing the teaching and the learning process. The thesis shows the importance of creativity, emotional understanding and development, improved self-esteem and a notion of the joy of autonomy to enable the students to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Rawal (2009) shows how she has developed her living educational theory as she worked empathetically and caringly for the benefit of her students. As a playwright using dramatic scripts, Rawal explains how reflective learning can bring to light a creative and effective child-friendly method to track emergent changes in life skills learning in children. Using drama, Rawal demonstrates how a method of analysis of children's drawings can help with an understanding of the complex process of understanding life skills enhancement and the evaluation of learning. The development of this method of analysis is grounded in a dialogical enquiry based on a real-life experience.

Also researching in an Indian context, Fr. Barnabe D'Souza has produced his doctoral thesis, “Changing Mindsets? Evolution of a Rehabilitation Programme for Chemically Dependent Male Street Adolescents in a Major Indian City” (2008). D'Souza has worked in Mumbai supporting street boys since 1982, full-time since 1986. His thesis began with the question, “How can we improve the educational experiences of the most vulnerable children in India?” Drawing on his thesis, D'Souza's (2011) book, *From Ecstasy to Agony and Back: Journeying with Adolescents on the Street*, presents the journey of adolescent street drug-addicts from psychological brokenness resulting from family disruption to the process of mending; from abuse, trauma and vulnerability to building up of self-esteem, talents and personality; and finally to the process of moving off the streets. He demonstrates, using a participatory action research approach, how children can be their own psychologists, creating meanings for themselves out of their own experiences and understanding. He claims that by taking ownership of their actions, street children begin to structure their moving off the streets, facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into society, thereby improving their status.

### *Europe*

From Europe there are the living theories from Croatian educational researchers being supported by Branko Bogнар, the Head of Pedagogy at the Josip Strossmayer University in Osijek. He has co-written *Pupils as Action Researchers: Improving Something Important in our Lives* (Bognar & Zovko, 2008). They

point out that although an increasing number of teachers carry out action research inquiries in their educational practice, the role of pupils and students is not still sufficiently explored. Holding firm to the value that pupils should be equal participants, Bogнар and Zovko explore the possibility of pupils becoming fully fledged action researchers. With the help of video-data from classrooms, and with evidence from the pupils' voices, they explain how 10-year-old pupils take over the processes of action research themselves. This has also been shown to be possible with six-year-olds in Mounter's (2007) action research. Bogнар and Zovko's research took place in a child-oriented school whose main purpose was the development of the creative potentials of all participants. In their inquiry the pupils determined their own challenges with the aim of improving something important in their own lives. Bogнар and Zovko show that action research is meaningful when students engage with it on their own terms, on the basis of their own needs, interests and self-chosen values.

Also from Europe we have the living theories being developed and supported by Margaret Farren and Yvonne Crotty of Dublin City University. Farren's doctoral thesis, *"How can I Create a Pedagogy of the Unique Through a Web of Betweenness?"* (2005), examines the growth of her educational knowledge and the development of her practice as higher education educator, over six years of self-study. The thesis explains the evolution of her educational influence in her own learning, the learning of others and in the education of social formations. Farren and I agree that by the education of social formations we include the meanings of living values that carry hope for the future of humanity more fully, in the rules and processes that govern its social organisation

In her paper, *"Through the Enlightened Eye and I – Am I Bringing Creativity and Visual Literacy into Higher Level Education?"*, Crotty (2011) discusses what she means by visual narratives. She shows how her learning in school and higher education has shaped her teaching and explains the importance of emotions in teaching and learning and how these have influenced her emerging pedagogy.

Crotty describes the Masters programme at Dublin City University and how she supports students on the MSc in Education and Training Management programme. The 2011 special issue of the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* comprises four papers by students supported by Crotty. The papers show the values, ethos and spirit of the course she runs and the influence of her own research in introducing creativity and visual literacy into higher education studies for practicing educators. I do urge you to access the special issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (Crotty, 2011) as it shows the originality and significance of the research being support by Crotty and Farren at Dublin City University's Centre for Workplace Learning and e-Innovation with great potential for the development of cooperative enquiries to develop our mutual research interests.

The third contribution from Europe includes my own research and reviews, from a living-theory perspective, of two publications from the Council of Europe with its 47 member states. The Council is supporting the Pestalozzi Programme for enhancing education.

I set out some implications of educational research for social change with living-educational-theories in a recent keynote in Norway, *"Theories Produced by Practitioner Researchers: Contribution to Improvement both Locally and Globally"* (Whitehead, 2011). In the keynote I focused on:

- The development of good and researchable problems.
- A discussion of the current base of theory, and the implications of the choice of theory in relation to choice of method and analysis.
- A discussion of the methodological approach.

As my contribution to the conversation on developing an agenda for Norwegian research on teacher education (Whitehead, 2011a), I focused on the improvements both locally and globally of the theories produced by practitioner-researchers in relation to the three points above. I am thinking of practitioner--researchers who want both to improve practice and contribute to knowledge through enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" such as those by Flornes (2007) and Gjøtterud (2009, 2011).

My two reviews of Council of Europe publication from a living educational theory perspective are of Huber and Mompoin-Gaillard's (2011) *Teacher education for change: The theory behind the Council of Europe Pestalozzi Programme* and the Council of Europe's "Constructing an Inclusive Institutional Culture" (Council of Europe, 2011).

Reviewing the Huber and Mompoin-Gaillard text from a living-theory perspective (Whitehead, 2011c), I advocate the development of a collaborative enquiry to generate living-theories that will be directly engaged with living the values of the Pestalozzi Programme as fully as possible. Without such a programme there is a danger that attempts to articulate theory behind a programme will remain rhetorical and fail to engage with the theory-creating capacities of practitioner-researchers throughout Europe.

Meanwhile, reviewing "Constructing an Inclusive Institutional Culture" (Council of Europe, 2011) from a living-theory perspective I acknowledge the importance of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjorn Jagland's point about rights and responsibilities: "The guide is an important part of the Council of Europe's action aimed at facilitating cohesion in our societies, based on the rights but also the responsibilities of every individual and every institution of our societies" (p. 4).

I also agree with Head of the Research and Development Division Gilda Farrell's point that "The task of constructing an inclusive institutional culture and intercultural competencies in social services currently raises a highly topical question: what will be the future of social cohesion in a Europe which is becoming increasingly pluralist under the influence of migration?" (p.5)

In my response I argued that in answering this question a different approach is needed to that set out in the methodological guide. The different approach is focused on the knowledge-creating capacities of practitioner-researchers in generating their living educational theories of social change. I hope that I have stressed this point sufficiently in this paper: it is the exercise of our personal responsibility for the public good in enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" that will help to contribute to advancing knowledge about education and encouraging scholarly enquiry related to education to improve practice and serve the public good.

### *Canada*

From Canada there are the living theories from educational researchers supported by Jacqueline Delong. Delong's doctoral research, "How Can I Improve my Practice as a Superintendent of Schools and Create my own Living Educational Theory?" (2002) focused on researching the development of a culture for improving learning by supporting the knowledge-creating capacity in each individual in the system.

Delong has created the website, "Welcome to Action Research Canada" (<http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada/>), on which she says:



In a culture of inquiry, values are expressed in different contexts with an energetic and dynamic response to creating individual and system spaces for learning and growth. The transformatory nature of my learning as a superintendent of education is described and explained in my PhD (DeLong & Whitehead, 2012) ... The focus of my learning over the years 2007–2009 demonstrated the growth in my educational knowledge with respect to my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, historical and current contexts, alternative ways of representing knowledge and how I might bring Indigenous ways of knowing into the Academy.

In “Journey to the Otherway: How Can I Improve My Practice By Living My Values of Love and Joy More Fully?” (2011), also hosted on this website, Elizabeth Campbell writes:

This paper captures my journey to create a living educational theory. In an effort to answer the question: ‘How can I improve my practice by living my values of love and joy more fully?’ in an authentic and meaningful way, I make use of methodological inventiveness and alternative representation. Throughout the project, I share narratives, reflections, paintings, video clips, songs and voices of ‘the Other’ to articulate, explicate and validate my values and living educational theory.

This is perhaps one of the best illustrations of the educational influence of the cooperation between DeLong and me (De Long & Whitehead, 2012). Our influence is acknowledged by Campbell in her original contribution to educational knowledge with a value of “loving kindness” in her living educational theory.

### *Japan*

From Japan there are the living theories of nurses and nurse educators being supported by Je Kan Adler-Collins of Fukuoka University. In his doctoral research, “Developing an Inclusional Pedagogy of the Unique: How do I Clarify, Live and Explain my Educational Influences in my Learning as I Pedagogise my Healing Nurse Curriculum in a Japanese University?” Adler-Collins (2007) explains that:

Two major strands of enquiry are interwoven and inseparable in this thesis. The first is my life-long self-study of my own learning and the values and practices that embrace all the different facets of my life, including being a nurse, educator, and Buddhist priest. The second extends the first, putting them firmly in the context of a specific time frame, weaving a textual narrative that passes between the different aspects of my multiple selves, building a picture for my readers that is grounded in my actual praxis.

In a collaboration with Chinese researchers, Adler-Collins (2011) outlines his analysis of how the sudden embrace of western medical and nursing concepts and values could be detrimental to China’s health and result in a non-productive clash of philosophies thus creating unnecessary tensions within the workforce . He addresses the question of the suitability of western forms of knowing dominating China’s traditional systems of education in health care through the author’s reflections of teaching in Japan and China as a nurse educator. This warning could be of use to educational researchers in Africa who may be stifling the emergence of indigenous ways of knowing through the inappropriate application of a western epistemology (Bruce-Ferguson, 2008).

### *USA*

From the USA there are the living theories being developed and supported by Jill Farrell. In “Cultivating Collaborative Self-study Living-theory: Laying a Foundation for Teacher Learning”, Farrell and Rosenkrantz

(2008) focus on their collaborative practices as a teacher educator and a classroom teacher: “In our efforts to bring teachers together for reflective dialogue and inquiry focused on the implementation of an arts-based critical thinking methodology, along with the nurturing of several action research learning communities, we continued to examine the emergence of our own living-theory” (p.120).

In “Confessions of Two Technophobes: A Self-study of Two Teacher Educators’ Efforts to Understand and Develop a Participatory Culture within a Technological Environment”, Brown and Farrell (2010) focus on the creation of a participatory learning culture:

Our aims were to co-create a participatory learning culture for our students crossing the boundaries of time, space and borders and document our journey. Our collective knowledge as experienced teacher educators is significant, yet our knowing is worthless if we cannot share and prepare a new generation of teachers. As self-study researchers we are committed to continual exploration of questions related to ‘How do I/we improve our practice?’ (p. 37)

### *Tasmania*

From Tasmania there are the living theories of environmental activism being supported by Phillip Tattersall (2010). The author, writing as a sixth-generation Tasmanian, tells the story of his journey to a new form of environmental activism. The influences of social context, family history and personal learning on his development as an activist are described and discussed. It is argued that Tasmania is still in the grip of an oppressive postcolonial colonialism that continues to shape the roles and expectations of ordinary Tasmanians. Living theory is playing a role in the development of the *next steps* as the author further refines his ideas and practice as he works through a series of living contradictions in his inner and outer lives. In this sense he is in an important phase of personal reinvention and spiritual rejuvenation.

### *South Africa*

From South Africa there is the living-theory of B.P. Singh (2010) in his book, *When the Chalk is Down*. I believe that *When The Chalk Is Down* will captivate your imagination and resonate with the life-affirming energy and values that you associate with a sustainable future for humanity. The story communicates clearly the relational dynamic of the life of an activist in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa as he worked tirelessly for 25 years to right a wrong over the withholding of the deeds of his parent’s house. The sustained commitment in resisting the imposition of inappropriate power relations filled me with admiration. This commitment continued through a career-long engagement in junior and senior positions in schools, unions and the regional offices. A most moving story with great educational significance for those who are seeking to humanise society through education and to facilitate the flourishing of humanity. It is also written with a great love of life.

Also from South Africa there is also excellent research emerging from the Action Research Unit of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University with Lesley Wood (2010) as she explores the transformative potential of living-theory educational research:

Transformation, based on the values of social justice, inclusion and respect for human dignity, is espoused by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University as a core value. However, there is a danger that transformation and its accompanying values will remain empty rhetoric unless they are incorporated into everyday practice at micro-levels. I am therefore prompted to ask 'How can we use educational theory to transform our practices at higher education?' In this article, I will attempt to demonstrate how values-based, self-study action research can help provide answers to questions about educational theory: I will demonstrate how I, together with colleagues, hold ourselves accountable for our own practices via the generation of living educational theories (Whitehead, 1989) and by so doing, make significant contributions to the growth of educational knowledge. I make a case that self-study practitioner inquiry has a vital role to play in the development of new theories of practice which will contribute to the transformation of the epistemology of educational inquiry in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (p. 105).

## Concluding Reflections

A chance meeting at the Ubuntu Centre in Cape Town with Joan Conolly of the Durban University of Technology led to invitations for several visits to the Durban University of Technology and my developing interest in educational research for social change with living educational theories. I have also been privileged to visit the Action Research Unit at Nelson Mandela University, the University of Cape Town, the University of Johannesburg for the 2009 HELTASA conference, Stellenbosch University, the University of the Free State, the Central University of Technology and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Each visit has served to reinforce my belief in the importance of researching the educational influence of an *ubuntu* way of being in living the values that carry hope for the future of humanity. I am hopeful that this paper will serve to encourage you, as an individual practitioner-researcher to offer your own explanation of your educational influence as a contribution to educational knowledge. I am thinking of your educational influence as you explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?"

In generating your own living educational theory I am suggesting that the inclusion of an *ubuntu* way of being, with the cooperative and relationally dynamic values that distinguish *ubuntu*, will help South African educational researchers to strengthen the global significance of their research as it not only contributes to the advance of knowledge of education and encourages scholarly enquiry related to education, but also improves practice and contributes to the public good (Whitehead, 2012a, 2012b).

I do hope that you will contribute to the development of a living values, improving practice cooperative enquiry, by joining the practitioner-researcher e-forum at <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?SUBED1=practitioner-researcher&A=1> and the international continuing professional practice project at <http://www.spanglefish.com/livingvaluesimprovingpracticecooperatively/> and that our conversations continue.

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Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012

pp. 23-36

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

## Developing Work-Based Practice: Conceptualising an Action Research Mode

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### Abstract

This paper reports processes embodied in the 'Developing Work-Based Practice' module in the Masters in Educational Studies programme at Edge Hill University. It considers the activities and phases underpinning the implementation of the module and the experiences of those involved. The tutor and peer-group adopt the role of 'critical friends' supporting participants as they progress in a small-scale action research mode. Outcomes of learning have manifested as developments in approaches to research and professional practice. The experience involves participants in adoption or adaptation of action research models or in the development of personal models. The approach reported here is essentially social constructivist. Conceptualisation and implementation of action research is supported by creation of a peer-group 'Validation Set'. It is proposed that the module offers an adaptable, practical approach to development of work-based practice, transferable to educative settings in addition to schools.

**Keywords:** Action Research; Social Constructivism; Reflection; Practice; Work-based

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### Introduction

"Action research implies adopting a deliberate openness to new experiences and processes, and, as such, demands that the action of educational research is itself educational" (McNiff, 1995, p. 9). This paper is based on my experience of teaching participants in the 'Developing Work-Based practice' module (totalling 30 students in three successive cohort groups). I have drawn my observations from my teaching during the module and represent personal reflections on its delivery. I support my observations through scrutiny of participants' writing about their learning and experiences of researching and with extracts from focus group discussions of their experiences.

In the module, we focus on exploration of an action research mode which involves Education Masters students in exploring, planning and implementing small-scale research activity. Participants are assisted in establishing an area of focus for investigation and action research through peer-support, within a structured framework. Those involved are mainly teachers, but increasingly practitioners from health settings are being invited to opt for this module, due to its generic focus on practice development. I invite participants to explore and challenge stereotyped notions of research, to consider the origins, drivers and permission to be a researcher and to analyse the qualitative evidence domain. I believe that this module and the approach to its facilitation is educative in that it assists conceptualisation of action research and is productive in establishing a vehicle for the individual's practice-development. As such, I believe that it provides a mechanism for supporting continuing professional development, generic and transferable learning. It represents a practice-based action research mode which "reflexively engages the world to change it and is reflexively changed in the process" (Carr and Kemmis, 1995, p. 236).

## Scope of the Potential for Learning in this Module

I believe that the scope of the potential for learning in this module can be expressed using Whitehead's (1985) notion of action research as, to paraphrase, a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in educational contexts in order to improve the rationality and justice of:

- their own educational practices,
- their understanding of these practices,
- the situations in which practice is carried out.

I justify the processes involved in preparing participants to become researchers within a small-scale action research paradigm using existing action research models and key, seminal, writers in this field as a focus. In this module I invite exploration of such models, but also provide an opportunity for construction of personal models, as variants, of an action research theme. The assessment process requires oral and written articulation in order to demonstrate critical understanding of models. I require that the participants' philosophy, values underpinning research, and the locus of permission to be a researcher, are considered alongside notions of rigor, validity, reliability and ethics. I conceived and developed the module around the following proposed 'Framework for Research for Work-Based Practitioners':

- Learning **through** a research mode has more learning potential than learning **about** a research mode
- There is closer approximation on rigor, validity and reliability of methodology and evidence if research planning and implementation is supported by interrogation by a 'Validation Set' consisting of 'Critical Friends'
- Research requires cognisance of ethical and professional issues
- Learning is supported by assisted construction in a tutor-guided group
- Learning is supported by conscious articulation via metacognitive dialogue and text production
- Adoption, adaptation or development of an action research model and associated methods of data collection are appropriate if the justification of the selection made is consciously articulated and subjected to robust peer-group examination.

I do not intend in this paper to propose a finite definition of action research or to analyse the relative merits of this theoretical paradigm. Indeed this would be a bold step, given the many definitions and explorations that can be found in the literature (see Bryant, 1996 in Scott et al, for such an attempt). However, I do propose a generic component of action research i.e. that it supports the conceptualisation and development of practice and encourages growth of 'conscious competence' (Dubin 1962) in educative activities. I seek to demonstrate that it supports the practical, pragmatic notion that "A research tradition which is accessible to teachers and which feeds teaching must be created if education is to be significantly improved" (Stenhouse, 1995, in Hammersley, p. 233)

I find, and offer, solace to those, who are perhaps concerned by an absence here of an attempt to offer an absolute construct of a theory of action research by arguing that "There is no 'best' theory about anything, just as there is no 'best' map of a particular area. All theories are devised for a purpose, and the best one is the one that helps you achieve the purpose most speedily, most effectively, or with the least effort" (Claxton, 1992, p.7). Claxton promotes permission to approach theorisation, including that of action research, with a helpful degree of freedom. Likewise, in this module I encourage a pliability of approach, unencumbered by a rigid, single, fixed conceptualisation of research.

However, I do propose that the possession of a scaffold or structure to guide thought is a useful prerequisite for a teaching programme if it is to be developed, practicable and implemented. The approach I used in this module offers participants the flexibility to adopt, adapt or develop a personal model or theory of action research. As guidance, I encouraged four requirements for action research for consideration, not as a stricture, but as key facets for focusing activity and energy. These are (Adapted from Carr & Kemmis, 1995, pp.244-245):

- having strategic action as its subject matter;
- proceeding through planning, acting, observing and reflecting;
- and involving participation and collaboration in all phases of the research activity

The processes outlined below offer space and permission for action research, which helps practitioners to theorise their practice, and to transform their practice into praxis (informed committed action) (Carr & Kemmis, 1995).

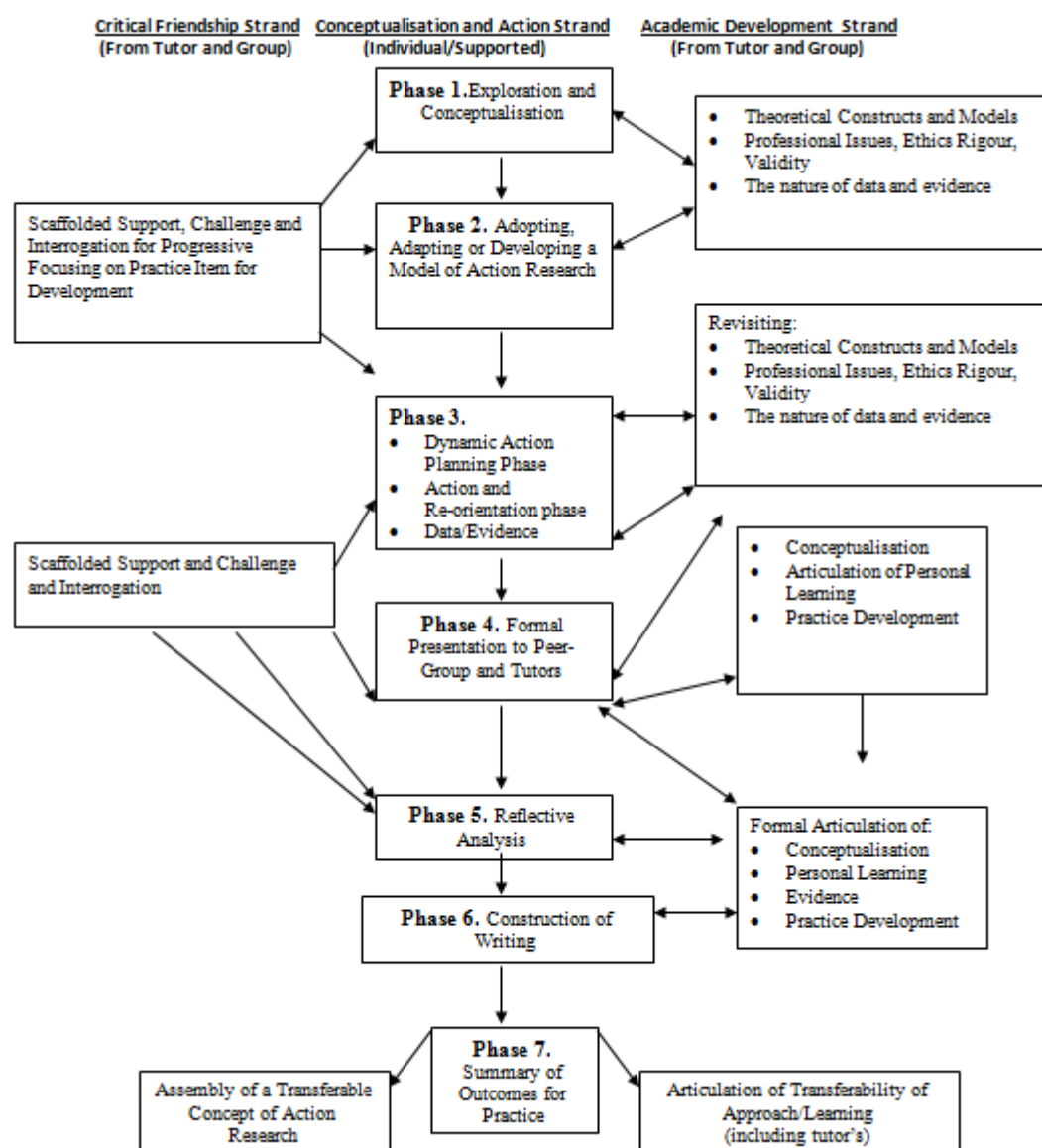
## **The Three Strands of Experience of Participants**

The experience of participants in the module involves three strands (see Figure 1):

- Conceptualisation and Action (Action Research and Reflection)
- Critical Friendship (The supporting role of the participant peer-group and tutor)
- Academic Support (Sharing of theories, models and constructs from the group and from the literature)



**Figure 1: The Three Strands of Experience of Participants**



The 'Conceptualisation and Action' **strand** is presented in Figure 1 as the central route of the module. Each **phase** in this strand is supported by scaffolded activities and interrogation by the tutor and peer-group. This group discussion and analysis provides support for personal professional development; it sets the tone for a climate of peer-group support for individual action. The strand encourages thinking and its articulation as an adventure and a journey towards self-knowledge (McNiff, 1995). McNiff suggests that action research implies adopting a deliberate openness to new experiences and processes, and, as such, demands that the action of educational research is itself educational. In this module, the phases of planning, debate, conceptualisation and subsequent immersion in a research mode, provides rich substrate for personal learning to be expressed, supported, and challenged in the peer-group. This occurs during University-based sessions; is captured in formal individual presentations to the group, and in the assembly of a written task for assessment. Jarvis (1998) invites us to consider groups as a locus for social constructivism; knowledge is created between 'knowers' and hence he subscribes to a notion of potential for mutual, shared understanding and development of ideas through dialogue. The module thus leads participants' experience as one of assisted individual construction of understandings of their research method and of associated analyses.

Each phase in the module is dynamic, responsive, involves development and contingent re-orientations in the early phases. It is characterised by reflection upon action and action upon reflection (Elliot, 1987). At each step opportunities are provided for explanation and challenge to participants' thinking. This brings rigor and initiates metacognitive dialogue which develops and reinforces learning.

Metacognition can be conceived as a process making explicit the learning which is occurring in the learning environment (Bickmore-Brand, 1994). The module is intended to act as a vehicle for an assisted cognitive 'tour' i.e. one of searching, sifting, reflecting, construction and reconstruction of ideas for presentation in the peer-group. As such it represents "Cognitive constructivism (which) implies pedagogical constructivism; that is, acceptance of constructivist premises about knowledge and knowers implies a way of teaching that acknowledges learners as active learners" (Noddings, 1990, p.10).

Group participation in the module thus constitutes a research 'Validation Set' for the implementation of individual's action research which "helps practitioners to theorise their practice, and to transform their practice into praxis (informed committed action)... Through the process of reflection upon both theory and practice, reciprocal skills are created whereby each informs and influences the other" Carr & Kemmis, 1995, p. 237).

This 'Validation Set' approach embodied in the module is proposed as a justifiable research process in itself. It brings shape and rigor to the pursuit of personal knowledge and understanding. Equivalent outcomes may be less available to the mode of free thought in personal, solo-reflection and the engineering of a supportive group by the tutor provides a basis for support and challenge which supplements and enriches the action research of individual participants.

The Three Strands of Experience of Participants will be described in reference to Figure 1. The rationale, pedagogic approaches and outcomes will be addressed by focusing on the central 'Conceptualisation and Action' strand, and how its phases are complemented by the two parallel 'Critical Friendship' and 'Academic Development' strands.

In order to present the development of stages of the participants' experience of the module, I will address each phase of the 'Conceptualisation and Action' strand in the sequence of phases 1 to 7 as in Figure 1. In doing so, the activities associated with each phase will be outlined, coupled with a report of observations. Exemplification of outcomes and learning will be offered, to provide a flavour of the explorations that participants have been engaging in.

## **Phase 1: Exploration and Conceptualisation**

This initial phase involves immersion of the group in debate around the following key questions:

- What might the purposes of research be?
- What might research look like?
- Who researches?
- Who drives and controls research?

Frequently, this phase has exposed limited concepts of research which are about 'proof-seeking', production of generalisable theorems, and numerically-led, statistically-based outcomes. Unsurprisingly,

development of best practice has emerged as a research theme, though often reflecting an initial simple conceptual model, a typical example being:

- Identifying of deficit e.g. in students' Standard Attainment Test data
- Deciding to do something differently to address it
- Planning to measure the outcomes and report them.

It is less frequently suggested in the first instance, surprisingly, that research may be about 'why' things may be the way they are in the practice setting, an aspect that became evident in the words of a participant, "An early learning experience for me in this module - and a very valuable one, brought about via peer-discussion – was to avoid trying to 'fix' what I perceived as a need, before first investigating my own perceptions" (Carol, Participant).

A predominant item that has arisen is participants' perception of a drive for those working as a practitioner researcher, to produce rapid, measurable results, available for scrutiny and which support public and professional accountability. This is perhaps indicative of the pressure on teachers resulting from the U.K government's historical drive for improvement in school standards, particularly via pupil-performance targets.

Whilst the above observations are not offered as a homogeneous representation of the thinking of all participants about the function and structure of research, they do exemplify a challenge for members of the group. This is addressed by reading of seminal literature on action research and qualitative research and active consideration of the following:

- the efficacy of researching, analysing and articulation of the practice situation under focus;
- the importance of the above as a prelude to making informed decisions about approaches to implementing changes/developing of practice;
- that evidence and data associated with research may take the form of qualitative, carefully represented, analyses understandings.

Participants are invited to think about the potentially restrictive nature of positivist, empiricist approaches in educative settings and to extend their thinking to include consideration of action research and its association with ethnographic approaches (see Hammersley, 1995). This has been particularly evident as a tension for recently qualified teachers and science and psychology graduates. One participant found the 'permission' not to have to represent data about her research into development of an outdoor play area for under five year-olds in a statistical form, as 'emancipatory' and unexpected within a perceived research hegemony. This is a real concern and is a key item of debate about how research may take shape and who controls that shape, "The aspiration to objectivity is mistaken in action research, the aim is self-critical reflection which helps the practitioner to emancipate him or herself from the dictates of habit, custom, precedent and coercive social structures" (Carr & Kemmis, 1995, op cit, p.236).

The notion of the potential of action research to serve as a professional agenda-setting device, to inform development of practice is explored. This supports and legitimises the generation of questions as a legitimate, qualitative outcome of research, "In action research and reflective practice, perhaps the most important message is that there is always more to be said" (Bryant in Scott, et al., 1996, p.119).

The next step is for individuals to begin to focus upon an item of practice development as the substrate for their research and learning during the module. This is assisted by the use of scaffolded pro formas which use the questions below to initiate the process of progressive focusing:

- What do I already do well? What evidence do I have to support this view?
- What would I like to develop?
- What would I like to change?
- How would I like it to be different?

Participants work in pairs to develop their articulation of ideas and then individually present to the group for discussion. The process is further refined by similar group activity to aid the production of an individual action plan, via consideration of the following questions (from McNiff, 1995, op cit, pp. 38-39):

- What is your concern? What is it you want to pay attention to?
- Why are you concerned?
- What do you think you could do about it?
- What kind of 'evidence' could you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening?
- How could you collect such evidence?
- How could you check that your judgement about what has happened is fair and accurate?

The individual action plans are further developed via support from the group, assisting elaboration of the focus by considering and noting responses to the following questions:

- How do I know what things are like now?
- How will I know how things have changed?
- How will I collect that information?
- How will I know that what I am seeing is what is happening?

The focusing that this scaffolded approach brings is perhaps exemplified by one participant's identification of a group of unruly six years old boys. Her feelings were that their learning was deficient and that their behaviour was making the classroom less conducive to learning. She initially wished to experiment with her pupil management strategies, perhaps by implementing a positive discipline approach, to remediate the behaviour and its effects. The group and the tutor encouraged her to reflect and analyse her perceptions of why the boys may be behaving so. The result was a shift in her focus to researching about and around the environment of the boys, gathering data from and about them. She became more knowing of them by observation and subsequent discussion with the University group. This shift, and other similar episodes of re-orientation of thinking, were captured by the group and discussed as items of the research process. It accommodated serendipitous events and thoughts and 'side spirals'. They felt it important that this become a generic consideration for all participants in their planning. These events provided a useful back-

drop for consideration of the nature of the starting point for practice development and reduced tendencies to immediately adopt interventionist strategies, prior to making sense of the context they were concerned about.

The process of interrogation, challenge and support is a key feature of every phase of the module and is modelled upon the stated purposes of the 'validation meetings' for professional development programmes established by McNiff et al. (1996, p. 25) i.e.:

- to test out arguments with a critical audience who will challenge lack of clarity, help identify weaknesses and suggest modifications,
- to consider data and the way it is analysed and presented,
- to sharpen 'claims to knowledge' and make sure that the data support them,
- to develop new ideas,
- to generate enthusiasm for completing the research.

The University group has thus become established as a 'Validation Set' for participants, "The research process creates a forum for group self-regulation which transforms communities of self-interests into learning communities" (Carr & Kemmis, 1995, p. 239).

This validation structure in the 'Critical Friendship Strand' and the assessment protocol (see later) recognises and gives permission to participants to modify their approaches and thinking in a dynamic fashion during the lifetime of the module. It provides structure so that "... the focus of the research is narrowed and sharpened, and perhaps even changed substantially as it proceeds" (Hammersley, 1992, p.20).

At this point, and at appropriate junctures earlier, consideration is given to an ethical framework of research. This is focused on a small set of basic principles, elaborated by McLeod (1994) which is summarised below. These principles are presented in the abridged form in which they are used with module participants to explore how they may impact on their planning and behaviour as a researcher:

- Beneficence (acting to enhance the wellbeing of others e.g. colleagues, students)
- No maleficence (avoiding doing harm)
- Respecting the choices of subjects of research e.g. practitioners, children
- Fidelity (fair, honest and just treatment of others during the research process).

Thus, in the ongoing process of sharing plans and concerns, potential institutional/professional conflicts and dilemmas that working in a research mode may present, are raised, considered and advised upon by the group.

## **Phase 2: Adopting, Adapting or Developing a Model of Action Research**

Upon reaching this phase, participants have considered a range of cyclic and spiral models of action research from the seminal literature as part of the 'Academic Development' strand of the module. This



typically includes the 'Action Research Planner' and Kemmis's self-reflective spiral (1981), variants offered by Elliot and Ebbutt, and McNiff's elaboration of such models via additional spiral dimensions (see McNiff, 1995, pp. 21- 46, for a summary).

Participants are invited to adopt, adapt or develop a model of action research, which suits the purpose of their focus on practice. It is reinforced that this may not be a static entity and that it may be altered and developed as the module ensues. There is, however, an obligation to justify and present their models to the group before and during implementation of their small-scale research project, and to similarly re-visit them towards the end of the module.

Some participants have adopted or adapted, with sound justification, extant models of action research. In addition, a variety of personal models have been developed. These include, for example, a metaphorical representation of research as a 'bus journey'. This focused on the effectiveness of a participant's work as a trainer of mentors to teacher-trainees. The central strand of the model was the route from embarkation to destination. This involved a research analysis of mentees' perceptions of good practice, to enable presentation of findings as items for discussion in the workplace with colleagues. However, the model was given added flexibility by allowing the journey to have 'sightseeing tours' at points along the way, when new observations or ancillary questions arose. It allowed the participant to explore the unearthing of unexpected sensitivities that mentors had about their own competence in practice in schools. This development of personal conceptualisation and development is indicative of growth in understanding of a dynamic process of (action) research.

A further example of a creative approach was a teacher's use of management of a parent support group as a vehicle for her research. She was assisting parents in learning about ways of developing approaches to supporting children with reading and writing of stories. She sought a way of investigating her perceptions of reasons for low levels of parental involvement in similar activities. Her model was essentially ethnographic in that she used the contact time with parents to discuss and identify successful and unsuccessful ways of working with that group. The purpose was to inform her design of activities with parent groups in future. By working from within this group, she was able to take the opportunity to check-out her individual perceptions of causal influences on levels of involvement. This occurred outside of the formality of questionnaire and interview, which many parents in the past had reported as disarming and threatening.

The focus of another participant's research was investigation of how she could become more effective in supporting a range of colleagues in her new job as a peripatetic special educational needs advisory teacher. Her key concern was that in a new unfamiliar role, she was uncertain of how to best meet the support-needs of colleagues in the wide range of schools she visited. Her initial model was one of a single spiral of acquisition of questionnaire and interview responses, reflection, and subsequent development of needs-related activities. This was to be followed by implementation and further analysis. During her operation in this mode, she radically shifted her model so that it included the flexibility to pursue unexpected questions and outcomes, many of which related to the different cultures and expectations in the variety of support settings that she visited. The development of additional tangential spirals in the model allowed her to follow the central theme of needs-identification, but also to capture many observations and reflections for discussion with the University group. The articulation of these data items greatly assisted her self-knowledge of practice and of the cultural mores prevailing in her practice settings. The examples above exemplify McNiff's vision of 'side spirals' in the action research process. The value of personal knowledge becomes evident in the words of Carr and Kemmis (1995, p. 237) when they stated "Personal knowledge is at the heart of the action research process; personal knowledge is the source of the ideas and interpretive categories used by teachers to articulate their experience and to bring it under self-conscious control through the action research process."

### **Phase 3: Dynamic Action Planning; Action and Re-orientation; Data/Evidence Collection**

The University sessions provide weekly opportunities for assistance in validation and clarification of on-going plans and models. There are two key 'orientation items' adopted during group discussions at this stage. These are:

- Help us to be as clear as possible as to the 'what', 'how' and 'why' in your approach
- Consider how do you/ will you know what is occurring? What is your evidence?

The operation of this phase assists participants in devising the approach to their small-scale research project, and with consideration of the nature and collection of evidence/data. It helps them to implement enquiry in the practice setting and is part of the on-going 'Validation' approach advocated by McNiff (1996). I suggest that the debates and the encouragement to consciously articulate thinking, contribute significantly to sustainable learning and professional development.

### **Phase 4: Formal Presentation to Peer-Group and Tutors**

As described above, each participant formulates a plan, operationalises it, and collects evidence/data. In order to capture the learning of participants and to support them in continuing their research project after the end of University-based sessions, each gives a formal presentation of their 'work-in progress' to the tutors and peer-group. The presentation is prefaced by an audit-scaffold of key considerations to assist preparation for this event. These are:

- Work in Progress
  - Outline of focus for analysis and practice development
  - Detail of Action to date
  - Detail of Outcomes to date
- Learning/Critical Incidents/Reflection
  - Communication of significant realisations/learning to date
  - Communication of questions/concerns as substrate for feedback via question and answer from the group
- A Future/Action Plan for the Remainder of Project
  - Report of current Status of action plan indicating any modifications based upon reflections/learning from the above
- An Effectiveness/Evaluation Strategy
  - Suggest details of method/s to be employed to monitor practice-development and learning prior to final written reporting.

During the presentation, each observer completes a running record pro forma based on the above. This provides a record of the key features of the presented content, and is used to log any observations,

questions or concerns that arise whilst listening. There is opportunity to question, seek clarification and check out perceptions with the presenter. Each observer then spends time completing a short summary of their personal observations, along with questions and any guidance they deem appropriate. This forms part of the running record and is given to the presenter to assist reflection on their remaining research and helps to capture any suggestions for re-orientation. This process complements the written task that follows at the end of the module which requires inclusion of consideration of any outcomes from this event.

This process is successful on several counts; it provides direction for the remainder of the research, offers a feedback artifact, acts as a prelude to the written assessment task and is an opportunity to celebrate fascinating work and growth of professional understanding of practice. It is a testimony to the positive development of the participants' group dynamic, a crucial feature of social constructivist approaches to pedagogy, or as Jarvis (1998, p. 73) states "A central (constructivist) method is 'real talk', which includes discourse and exploration, talking and listening, questions, argument, speculation, and sharing, but in which domination is replaced by reciprocity and cooperation."

### **Phase 5: Reflective Analysis Phase**

Whilst reflection and analysis characterise all phases of the module, the structure of the presentation and written task encourages participants to specifically articulate both their action and their learning. I proposed this earlier as constituting a research methodology in itself; the journey of constructing and verbalising such articulations brings clarity and structure to the reflective process. The assembly of the written task is guided by the following audit-scaffold, which is intended to assist the capture and organisation of ideas:

#### **Introduction**

- Explanation of rationale; articulation of the focus for development of practice and reasons for its choice.
- Consideration of theoretical underpinning from the literature, germane to the practice focus.
- Summary and explanation of responses to feedback from interrogation at the preceding presentation (changes action, reorientation of plans etc.)

#### **Methodology**

- Commentary on action/development of practice, including the key features of the action undertaken. Justification for the selection of an action research model from the literature, adaptation of a model, or development of a personal model. Critical analysis of fitness for purpose.
- Considerations of associated ethical/professional issues
- Consideration of issues of validity and reliability as elaborated in the 'Validation Set' activities.

#### **Data**

- Detail of outcomes/development of practice and personal reflections
- A record of any critical incidents

#### **Data Analysis and Commentary**

- Analysis of data

- Reflection upon critical incidents during the research, including success- points and analysis of any difficulties experienced

### **Conclusion**

- Critical Evaluation and Reflection upon data, the effectiveness of the research and its impact on development of practice
- Identification of personal learning, and critical reflection upon it
- Inclusion of reference to future development of the selected area of practice (real or potential)
- Consideration of transferability of learning to future development of practice, including articulation of a concept of action research
- Explanation and justification of any further personal professional development needs that have been identified during the research process.

### **Phase 6: Construction of Writing Phase**

This is an extension of the Reflective-Analysis dimension. Participants have, by this phase, already undertaken a research journey of oral articulation in the 'Validation Set' and have engaged with critical analysis in the formal presentation event. The final phase is writing construction. This is a further opportunity for learning and self-analysis. Writing is an additional component of the module's cognitive journey, and I suggest has merits in the research process described. The function in this context is that writing assists the articulation of learning and that it promotes the conscious integration of information and construction of ideas. It may force people to sustain their focus and attention on a given topic for a longer period than by thought alone. Because writing is less rapid than thinking, ideas may be elaborated in greater detail and depth, or in the words of Pennebaker (1997, p. 191) "Writing is more 'linear' than thinking, in that writing forces an entire idea to be transcribed before another is entertained."

The written task focuses on reflections on the research process as well as reporting it per se and constitutes an additional tool for capturing conscious articulation. This, I suggest, is likely to enhance transferability of knowledge to future development of work-based practice, as it encourages a deliberate attempt at construction of a record of what has been learned. It is a process of reflection and metacognition, bringing possession of one's way of knowing and understanding to the fore. Pereira (1996, p. 27) states "If we can cultivate an awareness of their own individual processes of learning we open the door to the ability to control their own learning."

### **Phase 7: Summary of Outcomes for Practice**

Participation in the 'Developing Work-Based Practice' module has learning outcomes for all those involved.

#### **For Participants:**

- Learning about the (action) research process and critical analysis of the structure and function of models.
- Subsequent accumulation of knowledge of practice.
- Development of practice and praxis (informed committed action)

- Participants' consciousness of transferability of an action research mode to other areas of practice-development (i.e. sustained learning)
- Subscription of participants to the efficacy of the 'Validation Set' approach

The value of this module became evident in the words of Anne, a participant, who stated "I feel now that I am more in control of my practice. I am better informed and can justify my actions and better defend my educational values. I also feel more self-critical and more positive about finding solutions to educational problems" and another participant, Suzanne, noted "The involvement in this module, and discussions that took place were liberating in the sense that they raised questions which enabled me to develop and improve my practice." Carol, another participant, mentioned:

I have particularly valued and appreciated the power of feedback from peers and tutors, their support, constructive criticism and advice. Having to explain and justify my model was an excellent means of ensuring clarity in my own mind. This was particularly useful in the early stages, when formulating the focus of my research; it was also helpful when preparing for my presentation, which tested out the route that I had thus far taken, and that which was yet to be travelled. It also ensured that I revisit the issues of ethics, reliability and validity.

#### For the University Teachers:

- Consciousness of a model of module delivery which itself serves as a research and professional development vehicle
- A proposition that the module is generic and thus transferable to other practice settings which are educative e.g. health services, law, industrial training. It has extended the repertoire of potential provision of continuing professional development.
- Consideration of potential for transfer of this approach to undergraduates in initial teacher education and other education studies programmes.

#### Conclusion

I have reported the structure adopted in the 'Developing Work-Based Practice' module to support the conceptualisation and operation of an action research mode. My personal exploration and articulation of the strands as the 'teacher' has also constituted a research journey, operating in parallel to the module participants. Observation of the participants, of their debates and presentation of findings affirms my commitment to the tenets proposed in the '**Framework for Research**' in the introduction section of this paper. A principal affirmation is that, learning **through** a research mode has more learning potential than learning **about** a research mode. This is also highlighted by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, p. 5) who state that reflective practice is a research process, the process of:

... generation of professional knowledge and the improvement of practice, through reflection of one kind or another, can be appropriately described as a research process. The reflective practitioner is a researcher. Reflective practice is a research process in which the fruits of reflection are used to challenge and reconstruct individual and collective teacher action.

The cognitive, conceptual journey undertaken during the module has served as a double-edged sword. It has provided a research experience for both tutor and tutee. The processes underpinning writing this



paper, for me, mirror the central intentions of the initial design of the module, i.e. that involvement would be educative for all.

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Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012

pp. 37-50

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

## Time to play: My reflections on pictographic prompts and their potential use as a creative and educational tool

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### Abstract


This article presents the work that led to the validation of my belief in playful and visual ways to facilitate learning. I use visual prompts because I believe they enable students to show their creativity and embodied knowledge. As an artist and educator, I have found that a seemingly light-hearted approach to teaching can promote creative educational experiences for both students and me. It also allows for in-depth learning and a sense of well-being. In this article, I focus on a workshop held at the Durban University of Technology in August, 2009 and describe the course of the day. I will critically reflect on how visual tools enabled the students to draw upon, and successfully demonstrate, their deeper learning in an intuitive way.

**Keywords:** Creativity; Education; Visual Teaching Tool; Narratives; Pictographs

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### Introduction

As an educator, I have conceptualised and designed visual images as creative educational prompts. The images are in black and white and are reproduced on cards seven by seven centimetres in size. I conceptualised and developed the cards as visual stimuli to encourage people to tell stories and to support my own narratives and painting practice. The images are simplified and abstracted so that one sees a basic but essentially recognisable silhouette. I have named these cards PicTopic , a trade name I have copyrighted. PicTopics are used to initiate imaginative demonstrations of students' curricular and embodied learning. In my fifteen years' experience, I have been aware of the connection between playing, creativity and well-being and my approach to my painting practice as well as in my teaching. I have noticed that when I approach my teaching with an element of playfulness the responses and creativity of the students improve.

The epistemological assumptions underpinning the work are interpretive with post-modern overtones. I am “emphatically and subjectively immersed” in my research (Maree, 2011, p. 33) and draw on the living theory genre of action research (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead, 2005), narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005; Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008), and visual methodologies (Mitchell, 2008).

I first tried out my PicTopic cards at the artSpace Gallery in April 2009. I was exhibiting a body of paintings that had pictographic imagery spray-painted into the compositions as part of my storytelling technique. At this early stage, as aware as I was of the potential for the cards to be used in a variety of ways and situations, such as aiding creative writing skills and counselling for both adults and children, I first had to have people try them out. When I spoke at the exhibition opening about my paintings and the PicTopic cards, I invited members of the audience to play with the cards. I wanted to see if my cards worked as prompts for people to create and tell stories. I asked permission from the audience to film and record their stories. Many agreed, but others were less confident, and so some recorded stories focused on the cards only, and not on the participants themselves. This footage was used in a presentation in June 2009, at our annual DUT Faculty of Arts and Design research conference. I discussed how the cards might be used in a variety of situations to stimulate interaction among people in a playful way, to stimulate creative projects with design students, to enable the development of creative writing skills and in counselling. As a result of my presentation, a lecturer, Lloyd o’Connor, from the DUT drama department invited me to conduct a workshop with its second-year drama students.

In this article, I reflect on this workshop with the drama students and demonstrate how I use a living theory methodology “to improve my practice as a life-affirming practitioner that values in others their individual dynamic and creative energy” (Whitehead, 2008a, p. 1).

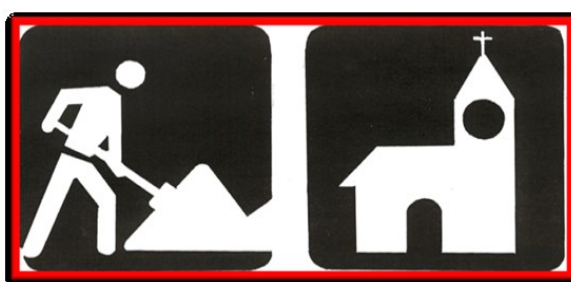
## The practice of ‘playing’

### What does it mean?

Finding ways to trigger one’s creativity using visual tools such as the PicTopics (see Image 1) to improve students’ performance and confidence, is important to me as an educator. This is linked to the conceptual framework I draw on, as I explore the values associated with fun, playing, creativity and well-being, which are core concepts that support the educational development of the individual.

PicTopics can be effective not only as a teaching tool, but also to encourage feelings of well-being and self-confidence: being creative and feeling proud of the outcomes of one’s activity can lead to personal growth and self-confidence. Playfulness and informality can intuitively unlock embodied and tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1966). I refer to this concept further on in the article as part of the validation process in my assessment of the workshop and the effectiveness of the cards.

**Image 1: Example of a PicTopic: Roadside warning sign and another image enabling the images to take on a new meaning**



## How do pictographic images work?

Pictographic images are used to share information. For example, the triangular warning sign at a roadside depicting a man digging warns motorists that there are men at work and to drive with care. They are simple visual signs that can “represent complex facts” (Abdullah and Hubner, 2006, p. 11). I have used this simplified style because information can be conveyed in a single glance. This is because the pictorial representations of the object symbolised are not usually detailed and the image is reduced to the important distinguishing features only. When a series of PicTopic cards is placed in a sequential order, as Kolars (1969) describes, they become a kind of “pictorial shorthand” (p. 350). Readers are able to recognise each individual abstraction, and then are able to rearrange the PicTopics in a sequence and create their own meaning, sense and story. When the “men at work” PicTopic card (see Image 1) is placed next to an image of a church, this juxtapositioning can create a narrative. People viewing the cards can fill in what they see in the PicTopics with their personal meaning from their own social, historical and cultural perspective. The PicTopics become not only an invaluable prompt or trigger in the creation of a story but simultaneously, could give a researcher insight into the associations that people make, which can lead to investigating how these associations develop and where they originate.

## Living theories methodology, values and standards of judgement

### What is my living theory and what does it have to do with my values?

My ‘living theory’ contains explanations of the “educational influence in my own learning” (Whitehead, 2008b, p. 104). My encounters in life and my experiences that make me who I am, that colour how I conduct myself as a social being, artist and teacher are facets of my educational experience and influence how I respond to situations. Moreover, because of this influence, I draw on these life experiences – sometimes intuitively and sometimes consciously – to inform and improve my learning, teaching and creativity. The many and varied life experiences inform my values, my theories and the reasons for how I behave. My theories about how to improve my teaching practice are then my “living educational theories” (Whitehead, 2005).

People learn best when they are having fun and enjoy what they are doing. They feel validated if the teacher and others accept their individual and creative liveliness. This belief stems from my lived experiences, as I am far more receptive in a learning environment when I am enjoying what I am doing, when I like my teacher and my teacher likes me. I believe creativity to be a form of “self-actualization” (Maslow, 1999, p. 153) and hence it holds great value. When I am immersed in the act of doing – creating – I experience harmony, a euphoric sense that all is right in the world. Because I acknowledge this in myself, I would like other people also to recognise this cognitive and emotionally inclusive association between the act of creating and well-being.

My “living standards of judgment” (Whitehead, 2005) and criteria for rigour are integral to my beliefs and my values. This means honesty with oneself is integral to the “living theory” genre of action research as an approach to research and teaching. McNiff (2002) confirms that values and beliefs are an integral part of the driving force connected to research, in that “[a]ction research begins with values and the reasons for our actions are often rooted in our values base ... the things that we believe in and that drive our lives” (p. 16).

### How am I researching my actions?

Research does not always proceed in a nice neat fashion. McNiff (2002) states that “most people experience research as a zig-zag process of continual review and re-adjustment” (p. 12). The image of the zig-zag resonates with me. It is from the word “zig-zag” that I came to understand that my action-reflection cycles do not spiral, but behave in a sense like ants. Ants zig-zag, purposefully, apparently going off at a

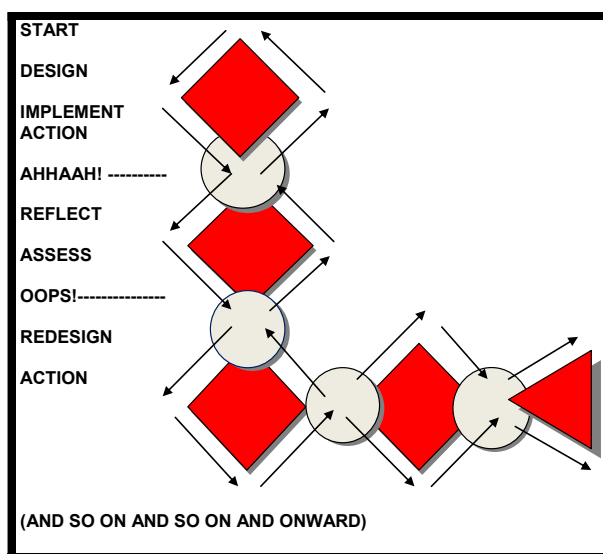
tangent but returning to the track, touching feelers with each other, and then meandering on. My action research is like one little ant zig-zagging along, stopping, starting, assessing, reflecting, going off again, feelers out, implementing, observing, interacting, noticing change, re-assessing, redesigning and starting off again. I follow the enquiry approach advocated by McNiff, which requires us to “review our current practice, identify an aspect we want to investigate; imagine a way forward. Try it out, take stock of what happens, modify what we are doing in the light of what we have found and continue working in this new way. [We] monitor what we do, review, evaluate, modify, act upon and so on” (McNiff, 2002, p. 11).

The action research meander that I am undertaking is a process of exploration that seems to have no identifiable ending, and according to McNiff (2002) “there are no real endings but continual new beginnings” (p. 21) and new opportunities for researching transformational and creative learning. Whitehead (2008b) and McNiff (2002) speak of the importance of critical feedback in evaluating the validity of one’s research. Endorsement of what one is doing by others can show that the research has influenced the situation in a fair and positive way. I show how this study has been endorsed by presenting the feedback and comments of the drama lecturer, Lloyd o’Connor, and his students. I also reflect on the workshop and its assessment in terms of:

- whether the workshop encompassed my values and beliefs;
- evidence of my educational influence; and
- improvements to be made to my theories before having another workshop.

This zig-zag model is continually repeated so that I improve my practice and live by my values. To illustrate, the action research ‘ant meander’ (see Image 2) starts with the creation of the cards. It then moves to the first diamond shape, which could represent the exhibition at the art gallery. The following diamond shape could represent the talk at the research conference. Next to this third diamond shape is a new offshoot which depicts the workshop with the drama students. The model grows new arms as I do more research. A new interlinking diamond on this right arm would indicate new actions after reflecting and assessing on the drama workshop. Eventually an interlinking diamond and circle format is created and every junction connects and links back to a common starting point.

**Image 2: The Ant Meander**





## Narrative enquiry and visual methodologies

I concur with Chase's description of narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) as being "a retrospective meaning-making ... a shaping or ordering of past experiences; a way to understand one's own and others' actions and of a way to comprehend events into a meaningful whole" (p. 656). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008, p. 19) write of narrative enquiry as offering researchers a way to think about and share their experiences. Time, people and place are distinctive features of narrative enquiry and Hamilton et al. refer to Dewey's (1916, 1922, 1938) emphasis on "lived experience". They recognise that the life experience of the researcher's knowledge is revealed in the narratives generated in educational settings and that research cannot be separated from values or context. I therefore present this account as a narrative of my enquiry, formed out of my experience and coloured by my values.

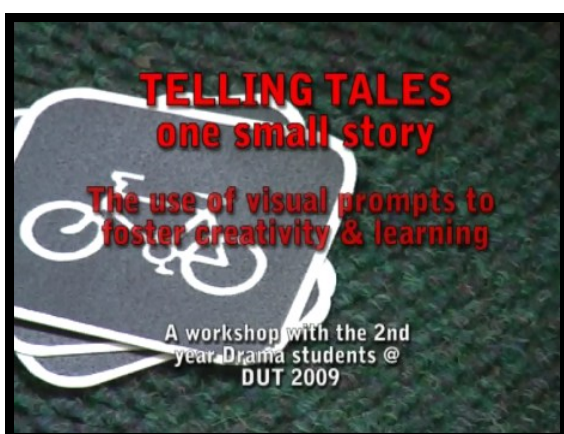
The use of visuals, such as my PicTopics, to assist in the creation of narratives is relevant because "visual images are particularly appropriate to drawing in the participants themselves as central to the interpretive process" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 374). The students at my workshop brought their own experience to bear on the meaning of the images. In other words, they interpreted the images from their own socio-cultural contexts and their embodied and tacit knowledge. This is, I believe, because the PicTopics function as subliminal prompts or triggers and are conduits that allow the conception of creative undertakings, and in the case of the drama workshop, in the facilitation of performance pieces.

On the day of the workshop, I filmed seven performances, the students' rehearsals and my interactions with the groups. From this filming, I created four clips that can be viewed at the website <http://pictographicvoices.blogspot.com> (I will direct the reader to the individual clips when pertinent.)

The joy and confidence expressed in the main clip (see Image 3) is not something that can be fully or adequately transcribed on paper; the group's exuberance in the main clip speaks for the mood and energy demonstrated on the day. The joyfulness and wholeheartedness of the performances that I watched and recorded affirmed my belief in the value of allowing students to communicate their learning experiences in a playful way that allows for autonomy. The video clip of the performance is visible validation and evidence of the physical embodiment of the metaphorical thinking that enabled the students to make the conceptual connections between reading the pictographic images, making associations, creating a narrative and then translating them into a performance.

### Image 3: Telling Tales – one small story

Video Clip 1: <http://pictographicvoices.blogspot.com>



## The workshop with second-year drama students

### What did I do?

In this section, I briefly describe the way the workshop progressed and, for reasons of brevity, will focus on one performance in particular. The types of performances that emerged and which were filmed that day included dance, poetry, comedy, romance and some social pieces about addiction and crime.

At the beginning of the five-hour workshop, I negotiated ethical issues and stated the nature of the workshop. I asked students to use the PicTopic cards as prompts to create narratives that they would then turn into skits. I informed the students that I would be filming them and talking with them while they were rehearsing, and that I would distribute questionnaires to evaluate the success of the PicTopics as creative educational prompts at the end of the workshop. The thirty-seven students agreed to being filmed and to fill out the questionnaires, which would be anonymous. All signed consent forms.

I introduced the students to the concept of the PicTopics by showing them how they could be used and spoke of previous stories that had been told with the PicTopics. I explained my love of stories and how important it was that they created their own. I also explained that they would work in groups with a random selection of about ten cards to create their own type of performance. I reminded them that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and no preferred genres of performance. Unfortunately, I did not give the video camera to anyone to film me while I was introducing myself and delivering my brief, which in retrospect would have been very useful in critically examining how I conducted myself. I did not at the time think it was important; it was more relevant to me what the students were going to do. In hindsight, I would have liked to see whether I was energetic enough. Did I 'sell my product'? Was I convincing, warm, open and friendly? I now realise that improving my practice as a teacher hinges very much on the "life-affirming and loving dynamic energy" that Jack Whitehead talks of (2008b, p. 113), and therefore I will have someone capture my 'performance' in future.

Once the students were in their groups and had their PicTopics, they huddled together around the large practice room, sitting either on the floor or on chairs. They laid out the PicTopics on the floor (see Image 4 and clip "[Part 1: Conversing and Rehearsing](#)"), started examining, exclaiming, excluding, discarding and shuffling the order and creating new sequences. The room vibrated with people vying to get their thoughts included. As I was filming, I noted gesticulating, arguing and conceding, and I watched the group dynamics with interest.

**Image 4: Drama students rehearsing (Photo by Scott, 2009)**



As their ideas developed, the students scattered, each group finding its own corner or vacant room, corridor or veranda around the drama department to put their performance together. It got loud, with bursts of enchanting singing, foot stomping dance movements, and laughter.

The space was buzzing with energy and excitement (see Image 5 and clip "[Part 1: Conversing and Rehearsing](#)"). Students worked on their own for about an hour and a half and I chatted to the groups individually. I also filmed them while I asking how they were progressing, whether the PicTopics were useful as creative prompts and whether they were able to create stories or narratives from the random set of PicTopics given to them.

**Image 5: Laying out the PicTopics (Photo by Scott, 2009)**



I also asked about the comprehensibility of images; what other kinds of images they felt could be added to the collection; what shortcomings there were, and so on. It was not a structured interviewing process. I kept it casual and affirming and answered whatever queries they had (see clip "[Part 2: Chatting with the Students](#)" and Image 9). The question asked most often was about the legitimacy of their interpretation of the images. I reminded them that whatever they read into the PicTopics was 'correct' and that there were no 'wrong' answers or responses. The key was that all were there to learn.

### **What happened?**

Once the performances started, I was amazed and intrigued by so many things: the students' confidence, the variety of performances, how excited and galvanised they were, and the high level of cohesiveness and organisation of the groups (considering the short time they had to put together and rehearse their pieces). I was also interested in how some of the images were interpreted (the students held up the cards they had chosen before their performances, as seen in Image 6) and the fact that simple images could prompt such highly individualistic vision.

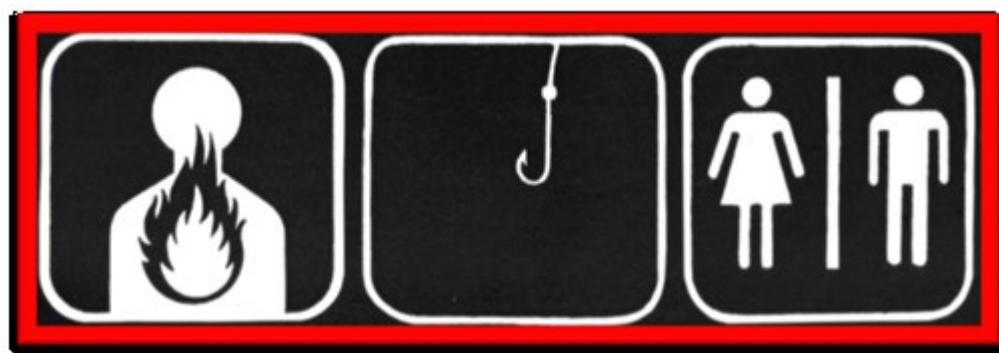
In the clip "[Telling Tales, one small story](#)" (see Image 3) we can see how the students interpreted the PicTopics. They are not only read in a functional way, as expected, but are also contextualised and deciphered in a variety of ways. For example, there is an instance at the beginning of the movie clip when two young men are explaining the story on which their performance is based (see Image 6).

**Image 6: A student holding up PicTopic cards in explanation of the narrative he and his group had created (Scott, 2009)**



One of the students in the clip “Telling Tales” holds up the three PicTopics that his group selected (see Images 6 and 7) and he explains, on behalf of the group, that they will be using the PicTopic of a male and female pictogram to talk about the union of men and women as a metaphor for marriage. The next PicTopic is of a fishing hook which is used to represent the meeting up or ‘hooking up’ of the individuals. The last PicTopic, which is that of a silhouetted figure with flames drawn up within the outline of the person, represents the passion that is ignited between the two betrothed.

**Image 7: Three PicTopics used by the drama students to create a skit (Images: Dreyfuss, 1972; Scott, 2009; Evamy, 2003)**



Other associations that were made with the cards were the image of a train that could be read as either a robot or a television set and an image of lungs read as a symbol for trees and nature (see Images 8 and 9).

**Image 8: PicTopics image of a lung is used to depict a tree (Scott, 2009)**



**Image 9: A PicTopic that could be explained either as an electric train, television set or robot (Scott, 2009)**



Reflecting on the work while watching the movie clips provides insight into the ebullience of the performers. Their knowing-in-action was made manifest in this playful creative workshop (Schön, 1983, p. 54). I also noted that the narratives were constructed in a traditional with a beginning, middle and an end. A number of themes emerged as experiences were layered. Simultaneously I observed reflection and re-remembering happening when the students expressed the embodied form of their learning consciously and unconsciously. I observed a sense of playfulness in the students' performances and was awed by their positive confidence and passionate energy. Because the students had the autonomy to create their own performances, they responded by showing their love for and personal commitment to their craft.

### **How do I assess the validity of this workshop?**

In this section, I draw on three tools to assess the validity of the workshop.

#### **Evidence of learning, play, creativity and well-being**

Judging the performances by my living standards of judgement (Whitehead, 2005) which are intrinsically linked with the values I uphold, I noted the students' sense of creative well-being and the unity of their whole being. Through the act of playing, the students were enticed by the freedom to create something of their own. This autonomy of being enabled them to create their own narrative and motivated them to give their best and in turn confirms my living theories and standards of judgement.



The usefulness of the PicTopics is assessed against the value systems I uphold. I used my living standards of judgement as my criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop, these being the playfulness, the creativity, the fun and the well-being that seemed evident from beginning to end. Thus, when viewing the film of the workshop, I noted down the evidence of 'fun', 'creativity', 'well-being' and 'play' in the students' expression of their knowledge. The variety of stories and performances indicates the usefulness of PicTopics in stimulating the imagination. The enthusiasm, spontaneity and passionate engagement of the students, reflected in the performances, demonstrated enjoyment and exhilaration, confirming the value of the PicTopics as a tool to prompt creativity.

The students in action and their total absorption in the task was akin to a "flow experience" or "optimal experience", terms coined by Csikszentmihalyi (1988, p. 3), and describes it as occurring in moments "when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something that is difficult or worthwhile". Csikszentmihalyi writes that there is a "oneness with the activity" (p. 34), meaning that there is this unity between mind, body and soul, knowledge and action, as everything just 'flows'. The unity of the students in their groups in the production of something meaningful, supported by the PicTopics, induced the expression of their tacit and embodied knowledge.

### **Feedback and personal communication**

Lloyd o'Connor provided feedback on the workshop, which helped to validate my theories about the positive benefits of visual prompts in teaching in the arts. He was asked to comment on how successful and effective (or not) he thought the pictographic cards were at prompting the visual expression of what the students have been learning in the programme and whether they helped to foster creativity. His response is given verbatim below:

The pictographic cards were an excellent source of inspiration for the students. The students, without realising, were engaging in a sophisticated process that was not only a creative process but also a performative one as well.

The element of 'play' is very evident and immediate especially when viewing the footage taken of the class. The students manipulated the cards to suit their needs and to the needs of what they were creating. The students engaged with a number of narratives through the cards that evolved from purely a visual narrative through to a performance narrative.

The question of 'autonomy' in a creative process is important because I suppose it is as much about the students' sense of agency and that they own the process. Although some cards did have symbols on them that were perhaps less open to manipulation than others, the students became interlocutors with each other and with the cards, each member of each group was able to read meaning from the cards and use it to contribute to the end performance.

The cards are an incredibly useful tool and I would very much like a set to do further performance work with students. (Drama teacher, personal communication, September 23, 2010).

I also asked the students to write about how they found their experienced using the pictographic cards.

I have recorded a selection of comments to capture the tone of the feedback. The last two comments are a clear example of why a follow-up session with the individuals would have been beneficial to my research, and to expanding my personal learning:



Yes, I did find [the cards] useful; actually it helped us to create scenes as a group to portray. The fact [is] that we got ideas from it and came up with something solid and useful.

They [the cards] made us co-ordinate our creativity.

They [the cards] prompt one to use a visual stimulus to engage our imaginations. They did challenge us to expand on our spontaneous imaginary thinking.

People came up with beautiful stories and personally it activated my creative skills.

They helped me think on the spot and helped me have a creative mind, in so we were able to create a picture out of our bodies, speech and mind.

I didn't see the point of the whole task; we looked at the picture and made a story that was boring.

The cards didn't give us much (sic) options to be creative.

The students' feedback corroborated my thoughts on the validity of 'playing' by using visual images to express embodied learning. I have taken note of which images the drama students thought should be added to the deck of cards, and I find I am continually adding to the body of images. Unfortunately, because the questionnaires were anonymous and because the workshop was, in a sense, a test of the PicTopic cards, I was not able to engage in one-on-one interactions with those students who expressed dissatisfaction. I would have liked to find out why these students considered the task pointless and why they thought that the cards did not give them options to be creative. Their feedback could have helped me to discern whether there were readability problems with the images, or if they saw the need for more images. Without personal interaction I could not pick up on whether the students' unhappiness was to do with the concept of the cards as creative prompts, or if it was a reflection of group politics. I have considered this and at future workshops I intend to ask individuals or groups for their full permission to carry out one-on-one feedback sessions. In retrospect, I would also have liked to know how they went about deciding which images to use and the actual processes that were involved in the creation of their performance pieces. This leaves room for further exploration.

## Reflection

Using the PicTopics as a simple and playful visual methodology is one way to encourage and have students immersed in the task. The students intuitively demonstrated their tacit and embodied learning. Their stories gave me insights into their socio-cultural experiences and worlds that I am not a part of. The performances mirrored social realities and I learnt from the students how connected they are with many social and environmental concerns. The performances validated the students' "knowing in action" (Schön, 1983, p. 51) and their "embodied" (Whitehead, 2010, p. 1) and "tacit" knowledge (Polanyi, 1966, p. 7) of performance.

Reflecting upon what happened at the workshop, I can demonstrate how my living standards of judgement which encompass my values are continually validated by the visual embodiment of play, fun, well-being and creativity. With this in mind then, I used my living standards of judgement to analyse, assess, and improve upon the pictographic cards as a way to facilitate learning. In this demonstration of my educational influence and living standards of judgement (Whitehead, 2005), I hope to inspire other researchers and teachers to find transformative, alternate, playful and fun ways to encourage students to demonstrate their deep and embodied learning.

The video clips provide evidence of visual representations of communication and high levels of organisation within the groups. The dynamics of the students' interactions with each other, in their movements and

voices, cannot be adequately expressed on paper but are illustrated in the various clips filmed during the workshop and available at <http://pictographicvoices.blogspot.com>.

When I watched the performances and the interviews with some of the groups I noted that the members of the teams were all working with each other. I saw them sitting huddled together going through the various PicTopics, discussing and interpreting the images, deciding on their meaning and deciding which PicTopics would be relevant.

The students also applied their evaluative skills as I watched and listened to them discussing each PicTopic, debating if it would have value in the conceptualising of their narrative. I saw this in the clip, too; they did it by laying out all the cards on the floor or on tables and going through a process of elimination. The students interpreted, critically analysed and evaluated the images on the PicTopics. They abandoned some PicTopics, then regrouped others and changed the associations that developed by putting various PicTopics together.

As they talked and planned their performances, the students were engaged in getting consensus from each other on what the story or skit should be, who should play which role, and the type of performance that would suit their narrative. A series of negotiations took place so that all the members of the group could agree upon a story. The script they developed was collaborative. The students had to identify and solve problems including dealing with the dynamics of a group and having to be sensitive and inclusive of each other. They agreed to the specific roles they were assigned to achieve a successful result (the performance). That they worked it out together verifies that they employed both their tacit knowledge and the skills imparted and absorbed as learners. They did not solve problems in isolation; they did so in a critical and creative way. This validated their understanding of the task put to them. These actions are visually recorded and demonstrate that the students could and did communicate effectively.

They also recalled and applied specific screen- or script-writing skills learnt in the course. They comprehended the brief and the aim of the workshop and recalled facts about developing a concept and then, as a group, choreographed their narrative and transformed it into a visual representation. They willingly responded to the challenges of the day and appeared motivated to try something new.

I was aware, when watching the performances and considering them, that in all the visual articulation, whether serious or humorous, the students were all attuned to value systems. Their externalisation of internalised values comes through in the types of narratives they developed. For example the narrative in the hard-hitting drug-themed production, “You are a Failure” (see Image 10 and clip “[Part 4: You are a Failure](#)”) shows that the students are attuned to and critical of social realities. In the one of the performances, the students presented their environmental values and their awareness of a considerably important world issue through dance and poetry.

**Image 10: From the skit and clip “[You are a Loser](#)” (Scott, 2009)**



## What did I learn from this experience and what does this tell me about my practice and theory?

My theories about the interconnectivity between play, creativity and well-being in a teaching and learning environment, are manifest in the actions of these students and are confirmed by their stories told in performance. The evidence shows how playing can unlock and release embodied and tacit knowledge by using PicTopics as an alternative way to prompt creative responses. This is visible in the facial expressions of the students while they were practicing, in their communication with each other, and by the high volume of good and busy noise, and in the movement of their bodies while performing. As a visual learner myself, I appreciate the value of using visual images to enhance my own learning for improved academic performance and achievement. Other visual learners can also benefit from such visual prompts.

The experience with the drama students suggests strongly that playful ways to release deep learning are pertinent. Upon reflection, I realise that if I did not have particular beliefs and values, I never would have thought of the very simple idea of creating playing cards that could be used by people to tell me their tales. Whitehead's (2008c) statement, "I feel privileged when individuals share stories that reveal the values and understandings they use to give meaning and purpose to their lives" (p. 1) resonates with me.

I was validated that someone could see the potential of the cards and invited me to work with his students. I have learnt that my living theories fuel the core concepts of my teaching practice: that of the importance of play in teaching and learning, the value of autonomy as a way for students to give evidence of their tacit and embodied knowledge, and the enjoyment of my artistic and educational spaces.

## What Next?

I will be conducting another workshop with the drama teacher and his students. The next time I plan to have two video cameras and each will film specific parts of the workshop. I want to be filmed so that I can critically reflect on my communication skills and take note of my enthusiasm or lack thereof; whether I engage effectively with the students; whether I am clear, understandable and open to students who want to engage with me. There is potential in both the PicTopics and the workshop for expansion and links with other disciplines.

## Conclusion

Since the workshop, I have given a number of sets of PicTopics to colleagues to play with. They have been used as prompts in creative writing development and as an introductory icebreaker for new students to get to know each other. A teacher friend has used them with her seven-year-old learners and others with tertiary students from a higher education institution. The feedback I have received has been extremely positive and it is those new stories I would like to write about in the future.

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Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012

pp. 51-68

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

## Flamenco Dance in Primary Education: A living theory approach to dance education

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### Abstract

Linda Vargas is a flamenco performer and dance educator and Demi Fernandez is a flamenco guitarist and music educator. Working together for 25 years, we have conducted numerous flamenco dance workshops at schools in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. We became increasingly concerned with the challenges and constraints which seemed to be affecting dance in education. We began to reflect on the educational and social factors challenging dance education in these schools and decided to conduct a qualitative action research enquiry to explore our educational concern about how dance education was being implemented at schools. We used our knowledge of flamenco and dance education to devise a series of eight classes for primary school learners from diverse backgrounds. Our reflections on this process highlighted for us the potential of flamenco dance for personal and educational development as well as the opportunity it can provide for learners from diverse backgrounds to be able to come together in a way which is enjoyable and encourages cross-cultural socialisation.

**Keywords:** Dance Education; Diversity; Flamenco; Living Theory Action Research

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### Introduction

As flamenco performers and dance/music educators we have been invited to give numerous dance/music workshops and performances at primary and high schools, primarily in KwaZulu-Natal. During these workshops and performances we became increasingly concerned with how dance education is in many instances being marginalised in the curriculum. Even though dance is a feature in the Arts and Culture curriculum (Department of Education, 2002), it appeared to us that the implementation thereof was challenging for the majority of teachers.

South Africa has emerged out of a divided past in which people were boxed and labelled according to race and gender and in which thinking and culture were colonised by the dominant regime. During the course of our work in schools, we observed how disrespect for diversity is still discernable in many individuals and social formations, a fact that negatively impacts on dance in the school curriculum. We observed many instances where students were reluctant to learn 'someone else's dance' or a dance form which was different from their inherited culture. This seemed to place constraints on teachers who were aware of this resistance. For example, when Indian dance was selected many learners from African or European cultures would show certain resistance and when classical ballet was selected many showed resistance due to negative cultural and gender perceptions of classical ballet. In short, we observed that many teachers, and therefore their learners, were approaching dance education in a way which still evidenced what we observed as 'boxed' thinking.

During our workshops, we encountered further evidence of this boxed thinking in the gender stereotypes that prevail in certain cultures. The perception was often that boys do not dance, that dance is effeminate, or that certain dances are restricted for males or females only. South African dance educator Liliane Loots (1995) has explored some of the gender gaps and stereotypes that came to be associated with dance in the past, and has found that many of these issues are still evident in South Africa (p. 175). She suggests that assumptions about what is appropriate feminine behaviour and what is not appropriate masculine behaviour are heavily embedded in the stereotyping involved with classical ballet training and appear to have infiltrated other dance forms as well. In our experience this is so. The teachers we interacted with mentioned that many boys were often reluctant to have their masculinity challenged by what they perceived to be a feminine activity.

There are those who believe dance education should aim for and achieve professional standards and there are those who believe it should mainly embrace educational values (Smith-Autard, 1994). We believe this division continues to incapacitate the progress and successful implementation of dance into the classroom and that dance can embrace both simultaneously. We concur with Smith-Autard (1994) who suggests that new models for dance education should be sought which encompass both the professional and educational aims.

We have observed how dance can also offer wonderful opportunities to explore the emotional worlds of different cultures or ways of being and provide opportunities for individuals to connect at a fundamental level. In many ways this is also true of sport but, unlike sport which often encourages a spirit of competitiveness, dance can penetrate to deeper levels where the emotions provide opportunities for connection (Belling, 2004; Friedman, 2006, 2008b; Jousse, 2005; Maqoma, 2001).

Soudien (2007) suggests that in addition to addressing its educational challenges, South Africa has the task of trying "to build the nation" (p. 8), a vital task for the growth and prosperity of a new democracy. In fact, one of the operational principles of the Arts and Culture curriculum in education is that of "nation-building" in which "mutual respect and tolerance ... facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity" (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996, p. 7). Education which redresses the "past cultural biases and stereotypes" (Department of Arts, 1996, p. 11) is thus one of the goals of education in South Africa. "Dynamic interaction" of cultures is seen as possibly leading to "subtle cross pollination of ideas, words, customs, and art-forms, culinary and religious practices" (Department of Arts, 1996, p. 5). If movement is "common to all people, heedless of language and cultural barriers" (van Papendorp & Friedman, 1997, p. 5), we reasoned that perhaps dance is indeed highly suited to social interaction, healing and nation building. However, in the case of dance education we would suggest that it is not so much the curriculum that is failing, but rather that our teachers are ill-prepared for the standards they are expected to achieve.



## Why flamenco in education?

You may ask ‘why flamenco?’ and why choose to dance in a way that is not related to one’s inherited culture? I, Linda, was introduced to flamenco when I attended a professional performance of flamenco at the age of fourteen. As a third-generation, white, South African girl of European descent, I gradually became aware of the fact that identity is complex and that my inherited culture did not fully resonate with my inner personal being. I felt compelled to study flamenco. Sen’s (2007) theory of what he calls “the illusion of a singular identity” (p. 8) highlights the importance of recognising the individual’s ability to reason and choose aspects of their identity, as opposed to “unquestioning acceptance of received beliefs” (p. 9). I felt fortunate that I happened across flamenco which has allowed me to express myself in a way that transcended my inherited culture.

Sen’s (2007) view of multiculturalism asks whether human beings,

should be categorised in terms of inherited traditions, particularly the inherited religion of the community in which they happen to be born, taking that un-chosen identity to have automatic priority over the affiliations involving politics profession, class, gender, language, literature, social involvements and many other connections? Or should they be understood as a person with many affiliations and associations the priorities over which they must themselves choose (p. 150).

Sen (2007) suggests that individual identity has many aspects which should not be regarded as fixed, but which can be chosen. The same person can be a South African citizen, of French origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a man, a dancer, a school teacher, a feminist, and a heterosexual, a supporter of gay rights, a tennis fan, a pianist, and an environmentalist. According to Sen, these sorts of affiliations may not all have equal priority for the individual, and in fact may also change in order of priority in different circumstances. He suggests that while some aspects of identity may not be changed, some affiliations are in fact a matter of choice.

Sen (2007) regards the neglect of the plurality of affiliations, and the lack of freedom of choice to decide on the priorities of these affiliations, as a main factor in sustaining the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity imprisoning people in inflexible categories. He suggests that an important goal of multiculturalism should be to “enhance the capabilities of children to live ‘examined lives’ as they grow up in an integrated country” (p. 160). To this end, he highlights the importance of providing children with opportunities to learn about the diversity of world cultures and to learn to reason about and understand the choices that human beings can and do make.

We believe that dance education provides unique opportunities to explore world culture, while simultaneously allowing children to discover their individual and social identity, or what ‘names’ them (Palmer, 1998a). It seems to us that Sen (2007) is suggesting that sharing is inherent to individual growth. We suggest that as we share who we are with another, both of us potentially become open to change and transformation as well as connection. We would argue that it is this mutual interchange which informs individual and collective learning and forms the foundation of an empathetic society.

I, Linda, am South African by birth, but flamenco, a dance originating in Spain, has encouraged me to embrace broader perspectives of other cultures which extend beyond my immediate culture and to shape an identity and a voice that I could not find in the culture into which I was born. In Palmer (1998a) Kaplan reflects that “speaking a foreign language ... is a chance for growth, for freedom, for liberation from the ugliness of our received ideas and mentalities” (p. 26). I realise this may not be true for everyone, but it has been true for me, and therefore may be so for others. We reasoned that those who felt that their inherited

culture did define them may still perhaps benefit from becoming aware of how others dance and of other ways of being. We reasoned further that if this was so, then flamenco in education may provide opportunities to explore plurality of identity in a way that helps to transcend cultural, racial and gender divisions and to break down the barriers created by boxed, restricted thinking.

Flamenco is concerned with individual emotional experience and this is intrinsically linked to the social experience. Flamenco developed out of a multicultural interchange (Edwards, 2000; Leblon, 1995; Mitchell, 1994; Pohren, 1980). The marginalised or excluded in Spanish society came together to express their individual emotional pain and joy in a community of empathetic sharing which evolved into an oral tradition of song and dance called flamenco. The multicultural origins of flamenco (Jewish, Islamic, Protestant, Gypsy, Catholic, Greek, Indian) suggested to us the possibility of shared experience among individuals who were different in a number of ways.

When I was introduced to flamenco it became the lens through which I viewed the world: an opportunity to experience life beyond the culture into which I was born. My exposure to flamenco has enriched my understanding of self and others which has extended beyond my given culture. Parker Palmer (1998a) suggests that we are “drawn to a body of knowledge because it sheds light on our identity as well as on the world ... we did not merely find a subject to teach – the subject also found us”(p. 25)

I, Linda, feel privileged to have benefitted from a dance education and have come to realise the educational and personal value of dance and flamenco. I was fortunate to have parents who could afford to pay for private dance tuition and therefore I was given the opportunity to explore more fully what ‘named’ or defined me. I am saddened by the fact that this opportunity is not available to all children. We suggest that all children can benefit from discovering what ‘names’ them, and that engaging in a flamenco dance class may be a suitable vehicle to help them do this.

### **Why the need for intervention?**

During our work at various schools, we asked the teachers how they were including dance into their classes. We discovered that for many of them, dance education was more often than not approached in a tokenistic way. For example, we discovered that some of the teachers that we interacted with asked learners to teach one another, while others invited guest dance companies to perform or give a workshop. While these outside interventions are valuable, we would suggest that it does not provide the continuity that dance requires for it to be able to play a meaningful role in shaping and influencing individual growth. Few of the schools that we visited were able to employ specialist dance teachers and this resulted in the generalist school teachers either trying unsuccessfully to incorporate dance into extramural activities, such as school plays, or more usually, avoiding dance at school altogether. This suggested to us that dance as education was generally undervalued or misunderstood.

Furthermore, we observed that many teachers did not have the knowledge, time or inclination to study dance in order to teach it effectively at even a basic level. Many of the teachers we spoke to had limiting perceptions of their own dance ability –as suggested by statements similar to the following that we repeatedly heard from teachers:

I can't dance;

I am uncoordinated;

I am nervous to teach dance;

I don't know how to do those dances

Such beliefs tend to dissuade teachers from even trying to include dance in their classes, replacing it with other options such as music, drama and art in order to satisfy curriculum requirements.

The shortage of adequately qualified dance educators also concerns Sharon Friedman (2006), dance educator at the University of Cape Town. Her work identifies the need for dance educators who have been trained in all aspects of dance as well as child learning and development in education, and that this does not necessarily mean dance studio teachers. We have observed how many schools, in the absence of suitably qualified dance educationalists, seem to be left floundering and often resort to the local ballet or hip-hop studio teacher to fill the gap. While this may seem to satisfy an immediate need, we do not think this is sufficient to address the educational challenges facing teachers of dance in a diverse classroom. During our 25 years of teaching and performing flamenco, we have become aware of the extent to which dance can contribute to physical, emotional and psychological development of the child. (Boler, 1999; Jordan, 1966; Lussier-Ley, 2010; Murray, 1963; Sherborne, 1990; van Staden, Myburgh, & Poggenpoel, 2004) For this reason, we would suggest that dance education in the schools we have visited may need improved supervision and an overall vision to prepare teachers sufficiently to maximise the educational potential of dance in these schools (Levine, 2003; Maqoma, 2001).

Lynn Maree (2004), in her examination of dance education in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), also found that dance in primary education was characterised by random lessons with very little shape, context or connection to dance educational outcomes. Maree attributes this lack of teacher expertise to the fact that there is no guidance in dance education in teacher education programmes in KZN. From our experience we would suggest that ideally dance in education requires specialist technical expertise and that there are very few dancers or teachers who are able to master more than one or two dance styles to any degree of excellence. This led us to reason that perhaps this is where we could be of assistance and started us wondering how. Flamenco dance could be taught in an affordable way that is educationally relevant to a diverse body of learners and that, while not creating professional dancers, would have valuable educational benefits in terms of nation building, identity formation and the holistic development of the child.

## **The values which informed this research approach**

We believe that dance in education, as a timetabled school activity, should not be approached in the same way that dance is taught to those who actively seek to learn it. Dance as a compulsory school lesson needs to engage many unwilling participants, often from diverse backgrounds and abilities. This requires modification of teaching and pedagogy to address the challenges of implementing dance as part of the curriculum.

One of the values that inform our teaching of dance in these schools is *inclusion*. For this reason we did not focus on training flamenco dancers in the traditional manner, in which the emphasis is on technical skill and style. In contrast, we focused on rhythmical accuracy, strength, identification with self, and integrity, since a focus on the technicalities can be very demanding and often exclusionary. We endeavoured to draw out the stylistic and personal individuality of each learner. This resulted in learners being able to interpret the steps in their own way which differed somewhat from traditional flamenco dance.

We also endeavoured to encourage a *loving* learning environment with *respect* for self and others. This was encouraged during all critical reflection when we encouraged the understanding and respect of difference. *Enjoyment* was also a priority and we observed how this had a positive effect on learning and participation. Our aim was also to encourage a love of self and the other, as well as a love of learning through the creative use and expression of the body. We also tried to encourage learners to appreciate the value of *hard work* and effort and the rewards which ensue from such effort.

These values of love, inclusion, respect, enjoyment and hard work then became our “living standards of judgement” (Whitehead, 1989, p. 4) to which we held ourselves accountable. We not only wish to live out these values in our own teaching, but also to influence the development of similar values in the learners, and thereby hopefully laying a foundation for improving social relationships between people of diverse cultures (Frege, 2004; Friedman, 2008a; Hargreaves, 1994; Ickstadt, 2004).

We knew that if we wished to embrace diversity, our teaching practice needed to transform. This transformation would require us to search for new vantage points from which to examine what was, what is, and what could be. In this we were mindful of Smuts’s (1927) statement: “I wish to emphasise how important it is, not merely to continue the acquisition of knowledge, but also to develop new view-points from which to envisage all our vast accumulated material of knowledge.” (p. 6)

Our research question of how to improve our practice as flamenco teachers became grounded in our desire to become more inclusive for a diversity of learners and abilities. We videotaped the classes we taught. On critically viewing the tapes, we witnessed how dancing together leads to a shared joy which can form the foundation of mutual respect and tolerance by finding common ground through shared experience. While sport is able to encourage the breaking down of barriers in similar ways, dance often penetrates to different and even deeper levels of identity and commonalities (Botha, 2008; J.L. Conolly, 1995; R. Fernandez, 2010; Friedman, 2008a), something that could be of benefit in South Africa, allowing a once divided people to connect.

We decided to design and teach a series of classes for primary education using flamenco dance as a framework to address some of our concerns and to answer our research question:

How do we improve our practice as traditional flamenco teachers in a way which respects and embraces classroom diversity and aligns with educational aims and outcomes?

## **Research methodology**

A self-study approach was adopted to generate our own living theory out of our practice and lived experience (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff (2006) demonstrate how, within any lived experience, individuals may experience living contradictions, and how the resulting cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) can be used as a positive force to encourage deep reflection on how practice can be changed to be more in line with ontological and epistemological values. As practitioners reflect on their practice, using values as living standards of judgement against which to evaluate this practice, their learning forms the basis of their own ‘living theories’. Whitehead (2009b) explains that “A living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work” (p. 104).

There are two important reasons why teachers should do action research: first, to improve practice and, second, to generate new theory (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). We concur with McNiff and Whitehead (2005) who suggest that teachers rather than external researchers are best placed to evaluate and improve their own work and that teachers should be able to improve practice as well as generate new theory and knowledge to be able to disseminate their learning and make it available in the public domain as a guide for other educators.

Our approach to action research is a “a form of self-reflective practice” (McNiff, 2002, p. 6). In the living theory genre of action research, the methodology of an individual emerges during the enquiry and its form is unique in accordance with the individual’s ability to be inventive (Whitehead, 2009a). In this way

descriptions of what was done and why it was done as well as the resultant learning became a reflection of our inventiveness and embodied values and beliefs in action. As Whitehead (2009) states,

In a living theory methodology the individual includes the unique constellation of values that are used to give meaning and purpose to their existence. In the course of the enquiry these values are expressed, clarified and evolved as explanatory principles in the explanations of educational influence in learning (Whitehead, 2009b, p. 112).

Our dissatisfaction with the way dance education was being enacted in schools led us to seek alternatives. Margaret Farren (2008) suggests that there is a need for individuals to have a space in education “to develop their own voices” (p. 65). And so began a process of reflexive critique in which our self-study became enriched by our interaction with others and resulted in concern about change transforming into social action.

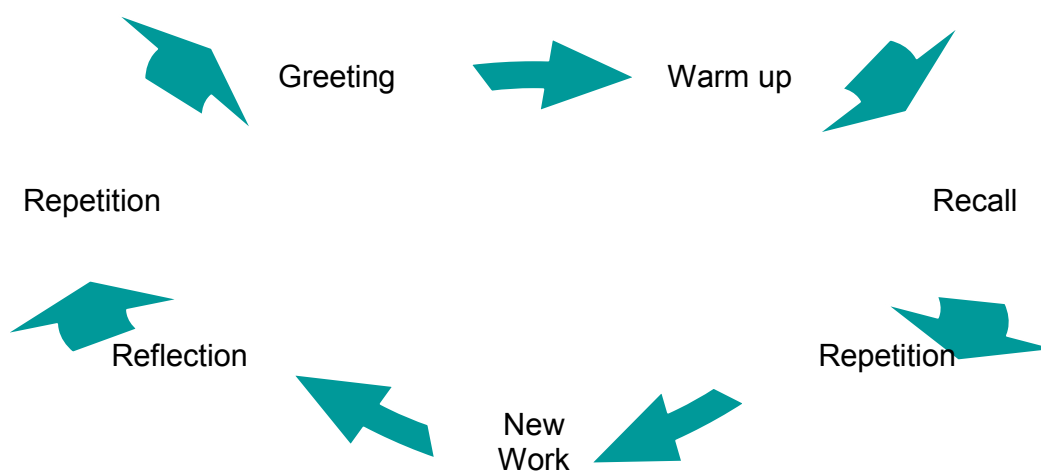
Donald Schön (1983) explains the process of critical reflection *in* and *on* action in order to understand and improve practice (p. 55). We have come to realise that individual critical reflection is essential to refine and improve our practice. We reflected on our own actions and thoughts, observed our learners and our relationship to them, our relationship to flamenco, and the learners’ relationship to our understanding of flamenco as experienced in our classes (Ellis, 2004).

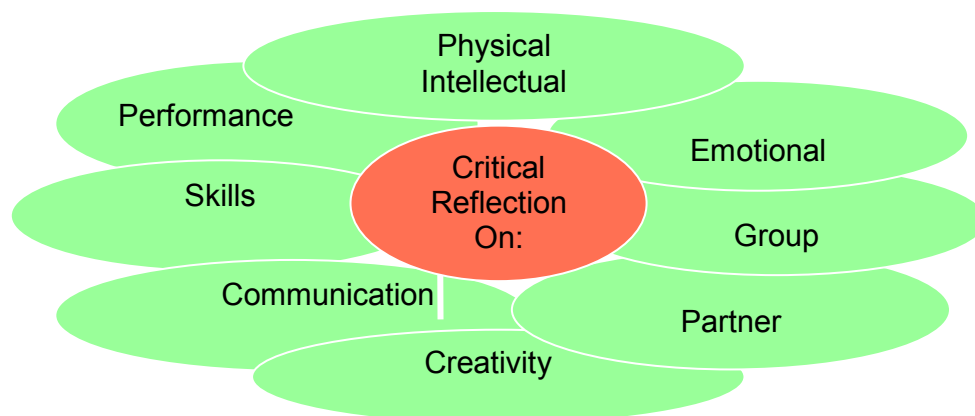
### What did we do and why did we do it?

I, Linda, devised a course of eight one-hour lessons for a class of grade seven learners at a co-educational school in Durban. I tried to adapt my understanding of traditional flamenco to align it with the aims of the educational curriculum and other relevant theory so that it could be introduced to a diversity of learners (Department of Arts, Science and Technology, 1996; Department of Education, 2002). During this stage of the study, regular critical reflection and in-depth discussion with teachers and learners helped to modify pedagogy and teaching techniques in accordance with our stated aims and values.

I gave each class a basic structure (see Figure 1) and a specific educational focus (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Class structure**



**Figure 2: Educational focus**

In each class I tried to encourage respect for individual difference as well as mutual collaboration to promote inclusion. I did this by dividing the class up into smaller groups to allow students to reflect on their own and others' progress. I encouraged them to clap the rhythm for one another and to develop sensitivity to each performer's needs and skills. I also encouraged them to give constructive critique rather than destructive criticism. I established a safe space by introducing my only class rule: no laughing *at*, only laughing *with* one another. In this way I tried to encourage maximum participation and reduce the fear of peer ridicule.

I linked the individual experience to the social experience in order to develop awareness of common ground and individuality. I did this by incorporating many 'times of reflection' when I stopped the class and we sat down as a group to reflect individually and collectively on the experience. I tried to make work fun wherever possible and to encourage an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust especially when individual's performances and abilities were critiqued. Teachers were present at all times during the dance classes and were encouraged to join in to develop their own learning about how to teach dance.

### Evaluation of the intervention

Just like Whitehead and McNiff, I believe my axiology (what I value), is influenced by who I am (ontology), which in turn is influenced by what I know (epistemology) in symbiotic relationship (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). The analysis of data in this intervention was grounded in this understanding. The boundaries between personal validation and social validation became permeable as quotes from participants and observations from critical friends became interwoven with personal explanations of practice and our reflections on video evidence.

During the course of the programme, teachers as well as learners were asked for written and oral reflections on their experience. In a journal activity at the conclusion of the eight classes, learners were also asked to reflect on their experience. When we considered their written and oral reflections, we observed how reflection on practice (Schön, 1983) revealed transformed individual and collective perceptions and we discovered evidence that learning had been influenced and mediated by our values of *enjoyment, respect, hard work, love* and *inclusion* (Cho, 2005; Gardner, 1993; Palmer, 1998a). A circle of critical friends which met on a weekly basis also helped us to evaluate findings, observations and perceptions (Whitehead, 2004).

In their journals, learners commented on the values which were modelled and aspired to during the dance sessions and which then became the living standards of judgement in the analysis (Whitehead, 2009c).



The enjoyment of the dance sessions was clearly evident to us from the videos as well as written reflections. Learners comments included,

“We were always happy to come to dancing” and

“Flamenco was an amazing dance to learn ... I absolutely loved it ... never have I had so much fun.”

The importance of enjoyment in the learning environment is so intrinsically linked to motivation and good learning (Palmer, 1998a). The dance sessions helped learners to become aware of this. As one learner commented, “You made us have fun but at the same time we were learning.”

Inspiring motivation and effort in learning are fundamental to success (Aaronsohn, 2003; Palmer, 1998b). In this regard we noted that our interaction with learners promoted the value of hard work:

“You were always kind. If we got a move wrong you showed us again and again and again.”

“You inspired me to work hard and stay determined.”

The values of love, respect, empathy and inclusion were also evident in the feedback from learners. We observed how learners became aware of the learning environment as loving and how they in turn expressed loving thanks for the experience:

“Wow what an inspiration you are to me ... you haven’t only inspired me you inspired the whole of grade 7... keep touching hearts because you have touched mine.”

“Linda, you are loving, interesting, never give up, determined to do better, anxious to do everything you do fun, dedicated.”

Our value of love in the learning environment is not exclusive to us. Increasingly theorists are realising that love plays a fundamental role in meaningful learning (Cho, 2005). Our expression of love took various forms, one of which was to adopt an approach which attempted to include learners of all abilities. While watching the videos, we saw evidence that the choreography challenged and stimulated learners (including a learner who was dyslexic and one with hearing difficulties). We began to observe how, when given an environment which was inclusive of a range of abilities, all could potentially find their voice and ‘speak’. We observed how this ‘physical voice’ as opposed to the vocal or literal voice is intrinsically linked to the emotions expressed through body movement.

An extract from Demi’s reflection reads:

While watching the videos I observed how each child interpreted the movements so differently and how Linda had been able to encourage each learner to be able to dance in a way which expressed their understanding and individuality so powerfully. This inclusive approach also seemed to encourage individual and group empathy to develop when emotional experiences were shared.

This empathy (or love) being expressed by learners was confirmed by the headmaster who commented to the learners that he had observed an empathetic connection develop amongst them during the dance sessions: "That's a connection that you have developed over these weeks with the people who were dancing without even realising it. That's empathy."

Inclusion was evident from the responses of learners:

"I'm not the best dancer but flamenco really makes you special and comfortable to do"

"I really didn't think I would be able to cope with dancing and didn't think I could do it ...  
I really had fun and couldn't wait for the next practise"

Another learner recognised the value of his experience and expressed the hope that others could be included: "Hope you teach others the dance and touch their heart and soul."

This aligns with Smith-Autard (1994) who suggests the need for a mid-way model of teaching dance: one which we interpreted as inclusive. Our inclusive approach extended into one which included the integration of the emotional, physical and mental capacities of the learners in the learning process.

At the commencement of the course the teacher commented on the lack of holistic learning opportunities for learners and the value of the intervention to encourage holistic learning (Jousse, Sienaert & Conolly, 1997):

This form of dancing for learners (flamenco) is such a good exercise/regime for the whole body. Physically – the movements can be quite demanding and tiring – and the sessions have shown that some of the children are not 'fit' and not so agile – this is quite scary for their age – they tend to lead such sedentary lives nowadays! –

It has been so apparent that some learners have seldom been involved in an exercise/routine where free movement of their bodies is encouraged, and therefore are very stiff in their execution of the dance steps.

We observed how the dance sessions provided opportunity for these concerns to be addressed as learners became more aware of the body as communicator. This confirmed our experience of the body as one of the most honest forms of communication and the importance of engaging the whole person in learning (Conolly, 1995). Learners were encouraged to engage their mental, physical and emotional abilities in the learning process thereby attempting to align our approach with holistic and inclusional theory (Smuts, 1927; Rayner, 2004). Our approach was therefore grounded in our love of meaningful holistic learning in an environment where all felt included to participate and where opportunities for empathetic resonance abounded.

## **Educational benefits of the dance experience**

On analysis of the feedback and our observations, it became clear that there were many educational benefits that emanated from the dance experience. We now discuss these below.

### **Improved concentration**

We found evidence that learners not only observed improved concentration in themselves, but they also observed it in others:

“You showed me how to focus and be more confident in myself.”

“The focus he putting into his dancing he’s also focusing in his class. So it’s kind of gone from the dancing to the classroom.”

Others concluded that their improved concentration was directly linked to the dance sessions. One student reported, “Your presence has improved my concentration and focus in many learning areas and I thank you for that.” The teacher also commented on this improvement: “I was also taken aback by the sheer concentration and focus of the children.”

Movement is intrinsic to meaningful memorisation (Conolly, 2002; Jousse, Sienaert & Conolly, 1997). Jousse, Sienaert & Conolly (1997) explain how memorisation is related to movement and the importance of engaging the mental, physical and emotional in the learning process. We observed evidence of this throughout the dance sessions.

### **Improved determination and perseverance**

Self-esteem, determination and perseverance in the learning process are mutually influential and impact on learner performance (Hoppe; Lee, 1990). We observed evidence of improved perseverance and determination in learners as the dance sessions progressed and this was corroborated by learner feedback:

“I really didn’t think I would be able to cope with dancing ... I practiced so much at home even my mother and brother know the dance ...”

“I practiced and practiced. Like you say, Repetition.”

Learner awareness of the value of perseverance and effort extended into transformed perceptions of ability in general: “You inspired me to work hard and to stay determined ... you told us to be ourselves and we were ... none of us are useless.”

### **Changed teacher perceptions of learner ability and improved academic performance**

There was evidence of learners becoming aware of their improved focus and how this transferred to the classroom: “When we were dancing we were concentrating carefully and we can use that in our class work ... thank you for teaching us the art of flamenco.”

A learner previously described by the teacher as ‘at risk’ discovered his incredible innate talent as a dancer, resulting in increased self-esteem, peer approval and transformation of his behaviour and academic performance in school. The teacher commented on this learner and how he did “not always feature academically and his physical build restricts his success on the sports field. He then tends to seek attention in other ways normally in a negative way and therefore is often in trouble ... During the free creative period, he focused and was doing some amazing rhythmic steps with arm movements as well. He has a natural way in his dancing. When asked to show his steps his grin stretched from ear to ear – what a positive boost to his self-esteem!”

The learner commented in his journal: “Before you came I was a very naughty boy always getting into trouble but when you taught us all those steps I started focusing on my school work and my behaviour and you made me realise that there is more to life than just being naughty. So the dance really changed me to be a better person and I love the dance thanks a lot.”

Providing opportunities for learning for multiple intelligences is of utmost importance in the classroom (Gardner, 1993). This boy was a perfect example of a learner with natural kinaesthetic intelligence which, to that point in his education, had not been given opportunity to be revealed. The boost to his self-esteem which resulted from this discovery then impacted on his performance in other learning areas. As the teacher said: “The focus he’s putting into his dancing he’s also focusing in his class. So it’s kind of gone from the dancing to the classroom.”

The relationship between the confidence of other learners and their learning was also apparent to the teacher. She also became aware of how certain learners who had previously experienced learning difficulties in the classroom seemed to excel in the dance class: “I am so amazed to see how some of the learners who have experienced learning a difficulty in class but here in dancing, have actually excelled! Wow what a boost to their self-esteem! ... Lovely to see that all are participating fully in the lessons even if they are battling to master some of the movements! Again – their self-confidence has grown!” The teacher seems to have become more aware of the relationship between self-esteem and success in learning (Palmer, 1998a; Van Staden, et al., 2004).

## Confidence

We observed how the dance sessions not only gave the opportunity to discover the talent of learners with natural dance ability but also provided opportunity for others who were not previously inclined to dance, to shift perceptions of their ability to dance. We observed the correlation between this and improved confidence through effort, mastery and encouragement.

“I am really a shy person when it comes to dancing but I’m not anymore because you gave me confidence ... most of my friends don’t like dancing but they did and the reason is because you believed in us”

“The children were really excited to learn the new steps and clearly showed their joy and self-satisfaction when they had mastered them.”

The development of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) is intrinsic to flamenco (Thiel-Cramer, 1990; Totton, 2003; Washabaugh, 1998). In its origins flamenco developed out of profound emotional suffering. It became cathartic by developing the individual’s confidence to overcome adversity and emotional overload. In the dance sessions we became aware of the potential of the physical mental and emotional power of flamenco to build confidence, knowledge and process emotions:

“By dancing I began to overcome my fear.”

“Linda you taught me to have confidence.”

## Identity

Dance studies can provide the opportunity for an increased awareness of and control of the body as communicator of self (Belling, 2004; Botha, 2008; Ickstadt, 2004). In the videos we observed how children of diverse abilities and backgrounds can benefit from developing an understanding of their body as communicator of self and gaining more control and awareness of this ability. One student reported, “I’m happy because I have learnt that you can communicate through the dance.”

The lifelong scholarship of Marcel Jousse (1886-1961), focused on the “original language” of man being “corporeal” (Sienaert, 1990, p. 96). He identified the “corporeal – manual” expression of the body and

concluded that the whole body communicating the thoughts and emotions of the individual was “the most faithful form of human communication” (Conolly, 2002, p. 3).

The learners seemed to have discovered themselves through dance:

“(In the dance) We revealed our true selves.”

“The dancing really brought out the person in me.”

“You have given us a way to better understand ourselves.”

These comments suggested to us that opportunities to become more aware of self through dance can influence shifts in perceptions of identity. Opportunities to become aware of identity as multifaceted and continually evolving was fundamental to our approach (Sen, 2007). Learners became aware of this as well.

One learner’s awareness of continually evolving identity also included learning which they perceived of as having life-long significance: “All ... that you told us I’m sure to use in my whole life ... you inspired me and touched my heart.”

Learners used the dance sessions as opportunities to deepen awareness of self and identity and life in general (Levine, 2003; Lussier-Ley, 2010). One learner commented, “The dance ... it has brought more meaning and has broadened my knowledge and skills on life!” (Fernandez, 2010, p. 202)

### **Participation in dance sessions promoted acceptance of diversity**

The challenges of polyculturalism in the classroom remain a reality for many teachers in South Africa (Friedman, 2008a). We observed in the dance sessions how flamenco can be experienced in a way that individuals do not have to conform to a physical, racial or gender ideal which may not be seen as achievable or desirable. “We put our differences aside and all worked together,” wrote one learner.

We also observed how learners who had previously been excluded due to dyslexia or hearing impediments, were able to participate in a meaningful way with the rest of the class. One young dyslexic girl, admitted after only one lesson that she had learnt to let go of her fear of dancing. She later commented in her journal, “At first I thought I could not dance but now I can ... I had a fantastic time and really enjoyed it ...”

The hearing-impaired learner who had previously been isolated from his peers showed the courage to dance silently in front of his peers. He later commented, “... you gave us a way to better understand each other it was fun and enjoyable and will be remembered for a very long time.” This boy danced in a way that was different from everyone else: he danced silently. His courage and our acceptance of his difference provided opportunity for his peers to accept his difference as well. Learners who had previously excluded him began to encourage him and to accept his unique expression of self. One learner commented on his difference, evidencing a shift in her perception of him and communication in general: “People who didn’t speak much spoke through their dance.” We regarded this comment as evidence of the capacity of this learner to be empathetic and embrace diversity in an inclusional way (Rayner, 2004).

Before the dance session the teacher described the class as ‘divided’. In the dance sessions we were able to observe the coming together of learners from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds in order to dance together. We observed the potential for aligning this with the aims of nation building (Department of Arts, Science and Technology, 1996; Friedman, 2008a; Soudien, 2007; van Papendorp, 2004). This is evidenced by the following comments from learners:

“We put our differences aside and we all worked together clapping and cheering for one another ... I’ve learnt to like some people in my class.”

“I began to overcome my fear and I learnt about other people’s differences.”

### **Gender stereotyping was reduced**

When we watched the videos we observed evidence that the basic stamping and clapping actions were accessible to learners who had had little or no exposure to dance and found great appeal amongst the boys.

**Video clip 1:** [http://youtu.be/Z\\_Ru\\_rCVsbA](http://youtu.be/Z_Ru_rCVsbA) or [click here](#)



We observed how the dance sessions provided opportunity to break down gender stereotypes rather than re-enforcing them, as so often happens in a dance class (Loots, 1995).

### **Teamwork**

We observed how the dance sessions used group work to allow qualities of leadership and teamwork to develop (Kelley, 1951). “You taught me how to work as a team,” responded one learner. The teacher confirmed this when she observed: “One good aspect that has definitely developed is the support for one another ... I was impressed at how keen and willing they were to volunteer to dance in the small groups and then how the ‘spectators’ encouraged and helped the dancers by giving hand signals – true teamwork.”

The following video clip gives evidence of how previously divided class members were able to dance together as one while still expressing and communicating their individuality.

**Video clip 2:** <http://youtu.be/qf4F-Hza9vk> or [click here](#)





An extract from Demi's reflection reads:

As a flamenco musician, I was struck by the accuracy of timing in the class group and how children from a diversity of backgrounds and abilities were able to dance with such unity after such a short time. I also became aware of how Linda had transformed her teaching approach of flamenco to become more inclusive which then allowed children to express their individuality with such confidence and enjoyment.

This sense of unity was commented on by learners: "The way we moved it made me feel as if we were one person when our peers supported us it felt GREAT. Linda thank you please carry on teaching it would be a shame not to spread the SPIRIT."

### **What are the broader implications of this research?**

We suggest that the new knowledge which emerged from this intervention was an understanding of an approach to flamenco dance which is values-driven and educationally relevant. While it may not be possible to fully generalise such an approach, we do believe aspects may be transferable. While many elements of flamenco in its pure form were retained, traditional approaches were transformed into one which was values-driven. While many flamenco purists may reject this transformed approach, fearing the contamination of flamenco and its consequential transformation into something unrecognisable, we suggest that transformation is inevitable in any dance form whenever it interacts with new social influences. This is the organic nature of dance: it is continually influencing and being influenced. Flamenco is no exception.

This gave us a new perspective on the potential of flamenco in education which allowed us to envisage other dance styles also possibly being approached in similar ways. We are in no way suggesting that the purity of original forms be abandoned. There will always be those who will wish to study the dance style in its pure form and hopefully there will be those who wish to teach it that way. What we are suggesting is that perhaps a mid-way approach could assist the successful integration of dance into mainstream education, especially in the early years of education. Here skill and expertise, grounded in educational values, could be encouraged so that dance becomes a holistic experience and contributes to the well-being of individuals as well as society.

Currently as dance struggles to find purpose and place in education, the age-old adage of 'united we stand, divided we fall' seems to take on new relevance. If dance educationalists become exclusionary and box dance into traditional categories which impose traditional standards for exclusive use by a select few we suggest that they will continue to divide the world of dance from within. We believe the diversity within the field of dance should be embraced. From our experience we would suggest that continuing to fuel the debates of whose dance is more suitable or worthy of a place in mainstream education seems pointless. This results in a general stalemate as dance practitioners continue to place the various dance styles in hierarchical formation according to their own perceptions of educational or professional value. Until this division is addressed we believe the spirit of discontent and competitiveness will continue to paralyse the progress of dance in education. Dance experts and educationalists need to align their vision for dance: the challenge then becomes not which or whose dance should be taught but how. We suggest that this will then require dance experts to engage with educational theory and dance-educational theorists and teacher-educators to engage with dance specialists.

Focus on teacher training in dance will assist the challenge of how to broaden the definition of dance styles available in South Africa in a way that includes and transcends professional and educational values. Here learners can be encouraged to respect difference while simultaneously searching for common ground. We

suggest that the definition of dance needs careful examination and adaptation to suit a diversity of learners including the physically challenged (Samuel, 2008). This requires respect for such diversity and for the dance form being introduced. Dance has many flavours and we suggest that young learners should be encouraged to try as many as possible in the primary phase in order to decide if they would like to choose any as a main course. This introduction of the various dance styles to the unaccustomed palate is where we feel vision and skill are required.

We have come to realise that just as the human voice speaks in many languages so the human body uses many languages to communicate. Learning to speak or dance in different voices helps to break open fixed categories and reveal wonderful new opportunities for connection and intercultural awareness which may help to encourage respect for diversity. Perhaps young children in a diverse society should be introduced to a wide variety of dance styles in order to allow them to choose which, if any, they are drawn to and to provide them with enriching ways of sharing difference. Perhaps values-based flamenco could be used to introduce dance to a multicultural classroom where cultural boundaries seem to divide and thereafter other dance forms may receive less resistance. These are ideas upon which we continue to speculate.

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Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012

pp. 69-84

[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)

ISSN: 2221-4070

## Competing with the tuck shop: How can I influence teenage food choices in this South African high school?

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on my personal journey towards finding out how I could influence teenage food choices in the South African high school where I teach. My quest is driven from my values of honesty, integrity and concern about the well-being of my learners. Literature shows that South African teenagers follow global food trends that could lead to the onset of dietary-related diseases such as diabetes later in life. As a consumer studies teacher, I feel that I have a social responsibility to care for the well-being of the learners that I teach. However, I still witness many of my learners regularly eating food that could result in obesity and dietary-related diseases. There are many factors that influence teenage food choices in South Africa today. In this paper, I draw the reader's attention to a trilogy of theories that may underpin contemporary teenage food choices in South Africa. Based on this framework, I conducted research in the school in which I teach to find out how I, as a consumer studies teacher, can influence teenage food choice. I used a methodology of action research to involve twelve learners in a focus group which met on a weekly basis. The research was conducted at two levels: level one was conducted by the learners in the focus group and aimed at finding out what influences the food choice of other learners in the school. Level two focused on my main research question, i.e. how can I influence teenage food choice in this high school? It is the results of this level that are discussed in this article. Data was collected using film which was later transcribed and analysed. In so doing, I turn the camera on myself, and realise that I am a living contradiction to the values that I teach. The findings focus on how I reflected on my practice to develop a living theory as an explanation of my educational influence on the food choices of the teenagers in my school. I invite the reader to join me as I reflect on the path this journey has taken me.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** Teenagers; Food Choice; Diabetes; Action Research; Living Theory

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<sup>2</sup> This research was conducted as part of a masters degree at the school of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education at the Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. Déirdre Kroone is the main author of the following article, which was written and edited under the guidance, encouragement and support of her supervisor Busisiwe Alant.

## Introduction

My interest in teenage food choices began in 2001 when I started teaching technology education in a South African high school. I gave the grade eight learners in my school a capability task in which they were asked to design and make a healthy breakfast bar. This involved the learners doing some basic research into the daily eating habits and practices of their peers. Year after year, as I repeated this task, I observed a pattern emerging in the eating habits and practices of teenage learners that caused me some concern. Many of the learners were coming to school without breakfast and purchasing items at the tuck shop that were high in macro-nutrients such as carbohydrate, fat and protein, and low in fibre and in micro-nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. In short, the eating habits of many learners did not appear to be very healthy.

It became obvious to me that this type of food intake could cause an increase in dietary and lifestyle-related conditions and diseases such as obesity and diabetes. One of the reasons that I became a teacher was because I thought that I could somehow make a difference in improving the lives of others. I felt that as a consumer studies teacher, I had a particular responsibility for the health and well-being of the learners in my school. Because of this, I decided to conduct research to understand how I, as a consumer studies teacher, can influence teenagers to make healthier food choices.

## Nutrition transition

In order to understand the background to my research, I reviewed literature relating to diabetes and teenage food choice both globally and in South Africa. Bourne (1996) first predicted that the current increase in degenerative diseases such as diabetes would accelerate with increased urbanisation and improvements in the socio-economic status of the urban African population. He concluded that this indicated the occurrence of a *nutrition transition* in urban African communities. This transition in the diets of South Africans was further highlighted in research conducted by Cameron (2003). He concluded that diets in post-apartheid South Africa have changed from a low-fat, high-fibre diet of traditional food to a high-fat, low-fibre diet characterised by the habitual intake of what is commonly known as junk food. This nutrition transition could therefore explain the change in contemporary food choices in South Africa.

## Global food trends

Cameron (2003) also found that contemporary eating habits in South Africa have followed global food trends of eating highly processed, ready-to-eat food. In many South African schools, this food is purchased from school tuck shops or vendors from the community who sell snacks to the learners at break time. However, this trend towards eating junk food is not only a South African phenomenon. Previous researchers in the field have indicated that junk food is also favoured by most youth in developed countries (Liebman, 1998; Lin, Guthrie & Frazao, 2001; Mullie, Clarys, De Ridder et al., 2006; Warwick, McIlveen & Strugnell, 1999).

One of the problems with eating this type of food is that it is highly processed and therefore the carbohydrate in this food is easily broken down to glucose in the body. This causes a rapid rise in blood sugar levels, which in turn causes a response in the secretion of insulin from the pancreas. The rate at which blood sugar levels rise in response to the digestion of carbohydrate is measured by the glycaemic index (GI). Food is rated according to whether it has a high, medium or low score on this index. If the blood sugar levels rise quickly as a result of eating carbohydrates, that food is given a high GI rating. Food that takes longer to digest does not raise the blood sugar levels quickly and is therefore given a low GI rating. Low GI food sustains energy and concentration levels and prevents over-stimulation of insulin from the pancreas. As a result, eating low GI foods could prevent the onset of diabetes later in life. However, Lin, Guthrie and Frazao (2001) found that even when low GI foods *are* available, there is no guarantee that teenagers will choose these healthier options. This study also suggested that further research needs to be done on motivating teenagers to make healthier food choices.



## Teenage food choice

There are many factors that impact on teenage food choice. Adolescence is said to be a critical phase in human development when the child undergoes major physical, psychological, social and behavioural changes (Subratty, Imrit & Jowaheer, 2002). This is also the phase where teenagers go through a crisis of identity as they re-examine old values and choices made in the past (Marcia, 1980). They often reject foods deemed to be healthy by their parents and teachers and choose foods that are seen to be 'cool' among their peers. As a result of this, adolescents frequently develop eating patterns that are unhealthy and may become difficult to change later in life (Davis, 1991; Napier, 2001).

Previous researchers have found that age, sex, socio-economic status, availability of food, participation in family meals and socio-psychological influences are all factors that influence teenage food choice (Bourne, 1996; Gobotswang, 1993; Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, Fulkerson, Story, & Larson, 1999; Story & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Warwick, McIlveen & Strugnell, 1999). They can be summarised as follows:

### *Age*

The micro-nutrient quality of food intake is reduced during adolescence (Bourne, 1996). Teenagers also tend to eat fewer family meals than younger children (Lin, Guthrie & Frazao, 2001). In effect, it means that teenagers may not be consuming all the essential vitamins and minerals needed in a balanced diet, as they are making their own food choices unsupervised by parents.

### *Gender*

Teenage boys consume too many foods containing saturated fats, cholesterol and salt (Lin, Guthrie & Frazao, 2001). Although boys tend to be physically active at this age and involved in sports, these nutrients can lead to dietary habits that can result in obesity, coronary heart disease and diabetes. The diets of teenage girls lacked essential minerals such as iron and calcium (Lin, Guthrie & Frazao, 2001). Both these nutrients are essential for growth. Lack of iron in the diet could result in anaemia and reduced ability to concentrate. Lack of calcium can result in osteoporosis later in life. Both iron and calcium are found in protein and dairy foods respectively. Protein and dairy foods are low GI, and consuming them could reduce the impact on blood sugar levels from eating high GI foods. Therefore, the lack of these foods in the diet could increase the risk of diabetes.

### *Socio-economic status*

Gobotswang (1993) recorded that households which had an income of below R1 500 per month consumed a limited variety of foods (Gobotswang, 1993). Neumark-Sztainer et al. (1999) and Warwick et al. (1999) noted that children from wealthier families had access to a wider variety of foods and more fresh fruit and vegetables. Warwick et al. (1999) also found that a negative correlation exists between income and the amount of money spent on junk foods such as fizzy drinks, chips and chocolate. The lower the income, the more junk food was bought. However, this study also noted that as the income of the family increased, so did the temptation to buy fast foods. It would seem, then, that if given the choice, most children will choose foods with high sugar and high fat content over healthier choices, regardless of their socio-economic background.

### *Urbanisation*

Increased intake of macro-nutrients such as fats, refined carbohydrate and animal proteins is associated with increased exposure to urbanisation, whereas the intake of unrefined carbohydrates, fibre and plant proteins decreased with the exposure to Western diets (Bourne, 1996). These nutrients don't pose a risk if eaten in the correct proportions. However, as refined carbohydrates and fat are cheap, tasty and quick to

prepare, more and more people eat a greater proportion of these nutrients in their diet than is considered to be healthy. Overindulgence in these nutrients is termed as over-nutrition, but can exist alongside under-nutrition not only in communities, but also in individual people. The school in which I teach is in an urban community. Most of the learners have television and access to the internet, and hence are exposed to adverts promoting junk foods and fast-food outlets. Therefore they are exposed to Western food trends and eating habits.

### *Participation in family meals*

As previously mentioned, many teenagers do not participate in family meals. This was also seen to have an impact on teenage intake of calcium, fruit and vegetables in the diet, as well as meaning that they missed out on the psychosocial benefits associated with family mealtime. Increased activities outside the home also resulted in an increase in food eaten outside the home (Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, Fulkerson, Story, & Larson, 1999). I suspected that I might find a similar result among my learners, as many of them are involved in extra-curricular activities after school, and do not return home until late in the evening as a result.

### *Socio-psychological influences*

Studies have indicated that both the physical and psychological development that teenagers experience are unique factors affecting the food choices of adolescents (Neumark-Sztainer Eisenberg, Fulkerson, Story, & Larson, 1999; Story & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002). Acceptance and support from peers is vital to the development of self-worth and identity in teenagers (Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, Fulkerson, Story, & Larson, 1999). Teenagers tend to rebel against cultural norms and values in an attempt to establish their own identity (Marcia, 1966; Warwick, McIlveen & Strugnell, 1999). This desire for autonomy may be expressed through rejection of food that is considered to be healthy by parents and teachers (Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, Fulkerson, Story, & Larson, 1999). Hence, a paradox frequently exists between the type of food that learners say they enjoy when at home with their families, and the type of food they choose to eat when with their friends (Stockmeyer, 2001). Many teenagers have expressed a dislike of the type of food served at family meals (Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, Fulkerson, Story, & Larson, 1999). In the case of learners from a rural African background, there is also a stigma attached to eating healthy, traditional food, even when it is free (British Council & South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement, 2007). Yet, indigenous or traditional African food intake should be encouraged, as it reduces the risk of high blood sugar levels that can result in diabetes (Mbhenyane, 1997).

In a nutshell, the literature reveals that regardless of socio-economic status, both male and female teenagers tend to choose foods that could increase the risk of diabetes. Their choices are strongly influenced by the fact that they are going through a stage of development in which they are seeking independence from parents and forming an independent identity. Teenagers living in an urban community or those exposed to Western eating habits through television and advertising are even more likely to make unhealthy food choices. Thus it can be seen that the reasons for food choice among teens are varied and complex, as more than one of these factors can be at play at the same time. Therefore no one single theory can be used to analyse teenage food choices, as these choices are based on factors that reach beyond teenage consciousness and control.

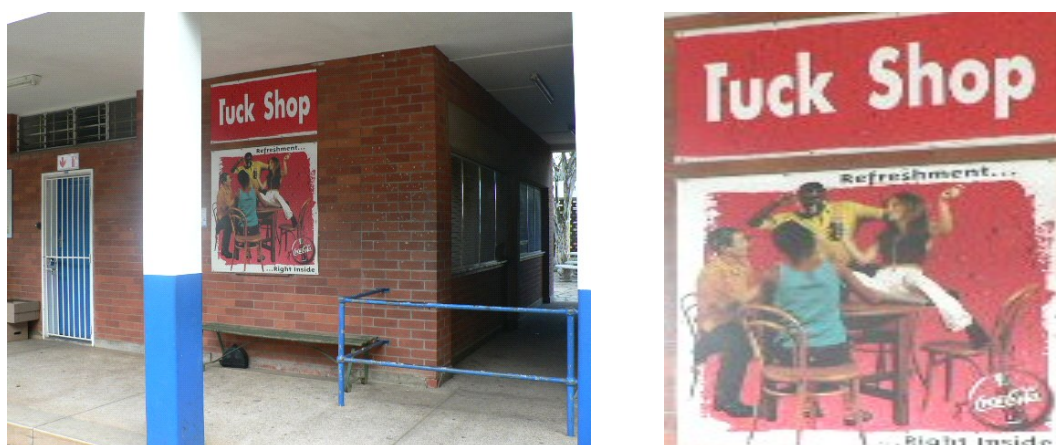
## **Theoretical framework**

### **Identity theory**

In his identity theory, Erikson (1959) states that due to hormonal and physical changes, teenagers reach a crisis of identity in which they are unsure of who they are, and so 'try on' various personas and social images until they find one which 'fits'. Their self-image is based on other people's view of them, in

particular how they are perceived by their peers and social groups. This self-image changes throughout adolescence with exposure to new experiences and societies (Erikson, in Gouws & Kruger, 1994). Gauntlett (2008) states that the media presents teenagers with a popular image of contemporary teenage identity and then advertises products that will associate them with this popular image. Multinational corporations (MNCs) may view the crisis of identity in teenage development identified by Erikson as a weakness that can be exploited for capital gain. They may use this knowledge when branding and marketing products specifically aimed at teenagers. The media therefore plays a major role in socialising adolescents and forming their identity (Irogbe, 2005). Giddens (2009) concurs with this and also states that teenagers frequently become *dependent* on purchasing products and brands that help them to establish a self-identity (Giddens, 2009; Gauntlett, 2008). MNCs create advertisements that present the vulnerable teenagers with role models and images that represent young, attractive, wealthy, popular people using their products. The young people in these advertisements are never seen in the company of their parents, and are often seen in a relaxed, social setting. Therefore, the MNCs have a tremendous ability to manipulate teenagers into adopting the identity and youth culture portrayed in these adverts (Irogbe, 2005). Many of these MNCs sponsor signs in schools in exchange for advertising. Below is one such example in the school where I teach (Image 1). The visual power of this imagery at the entrance to the tuck shop speaks for itself.

**Image 1: Advertisement outside the school's tuck shop**



### Dependency theory

Dependency theorists believe that globalisation serves the interests of wealthy, powerful nations such as America and Britain at the expense of poorer developing countries (Irogbe, 2005). The aim of the MNCs is to generate a profit so that those in control of the companies can become wealthy. In order to achieve this aim, they exploit the weak by creating a culture of dependency on their products (Irogbe, 2005). The MNCs recognise teenagers' need for autonomy and rejection of the values and norms of their childhood, and use this to market unhealthy food and beverage products (Irogbe, 2005). They do not concern themselves with the possible health implications of the foods they are promoting. Their products are widely advertised on television, radio, in newspapers and posters. They even go so far as to promote their products through sponsorship of healthy activities and sports events such as the football World Cup. What young person living in South Africa has not seen or heard the catchy song that clearly states "When I get older, I will be stronger" (K'naan, 2009). Yet the beverages advertised are extremely high in refined carbohydrates which raise blood sugar levels rapidly and could result in obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes in adulthood (Bourne, 1996). In fact, Diabetes SA (2010) states that as many people die from diabetes-related diseases in South Africa as those who die from Aids, and that this can be attributed to the high consumption of refined carbohydrates and sugar in the South African diet.

Although the link between junk food and diet has been established for many years, MNCs are still permitted to continue their expansion into developing countries such as South Africa. Many fast food outlets in South Africa are part of global franchises that are supplied by MNCs. Although they provide much-needed employment opportunities in the communities in which they are established, these outlets make a huge profit for the MNCs that supply them (Irogbe, 2005). The school in which I teach has a large number of fast food establishments within walking distance. Some of the learners purchase from these outlets on the way home from school in the afternoon. Others phone the outlets that have a delivery service and get food delivered directly to the school at break. Whenever I take my learners on a consumer research outing to the local shops, the highlight of the outing for them is to be taken to one of these fast food outlets for lunch. I sometimes think that nothing I teach them about nutrition and healthy food choices has any influence on the choices that they actually make. Psychologically, they could be dependent on the 'cool' image projected by MNCs to give them an identity that is accepted by their peers.

### Culture industry theory

Culture industry theory is based on critique of Western capitalist societies and the use of the media as a means of domination and control of the population. Culture industry theorists claim that people who are manipulated by the media are not even aware of their lack of freedom. The needs of the individual or the group are neglected, as material wealth is presented as being the ultimate goal. Fromm (1955) supports this view and maintains that the focus of modern society is to create a market for consumable products. Fromm also maintained that in an industrial (modern) society people lose perspective of who they are as individuals in the formation of a consumer market for industrial products. Therefore, rather than the industrial society catering for *existing* human needs, it identifies and creates needs within individuals through psychological manipulation. Teenagers were first targeted as a separate market for products in the late 1950s (Abrams, 1959). Abrams (1959) declared that "There is distinct teenage spending for distinctive teenage ends in a distinctive teenage world" (p.10). Hence the 'teenage' market was born. Since 1994, South Africa has become part of the global society, and so has become exposed to these international advertising strategies. The more 'developed' a developing country becomes, the more exposure it has to advertising and the popular culture as portrayed by advertising and the media. Most of the learners in the school in which I teach have electricity and television in their homes. Many of them have DSTv which links them with international TV channels and advertisements. Evening prime time viewing includes a lot of advertising of fast foods and junk foods. This allows the media tremendous control over teenage food choice.

In an attempt to understand how these theories may be linked in forming teenage food choice, I have developed the following model<sup>3</sup> (Figure 1). The arrows in the diagram demonstrate how these theories influence one another, thus forming links between them.

<sup>3</sup> I developed this figure in 2010 and presented it at a conference in Port Elizabeth entitled Action Research: Exploring its transformative potential, held in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) from 19–20 August of that same year. Since this figure is central to my explanation of how the theories I have chosen interact with each other and influence teenage food choice, I have used similar versions of it in other presentations and publications. These are listed below.

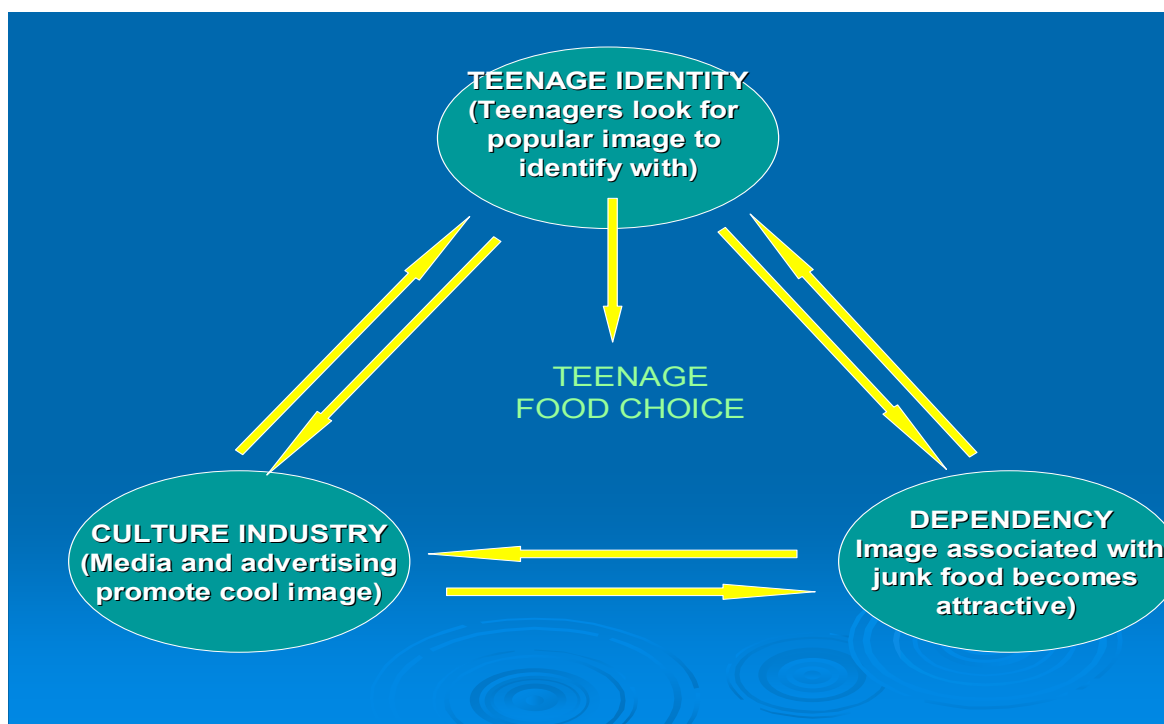
Kroone, D. & Alant, B. (2010). *Taking Control of The Tuckshop: How can we influence teenage perspectives on sustainable nutrition in schools?* Paper presented at the NMMU action research conference, Action Research: Exploring its transformative potential. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, 19 – 20 August, 2010.

Kroone, D. & Alant, B. (2011). *Development, diet and diabetes: Understanding contemporary influences on teenage food choices in a peri-urban school in South Africa.* Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> International SAAFECS conference, Building a New Identity. St. George's hotel and conference centre, Pretoria, South Africa, 7 – 11 March, 2010.

Kroone, D. & Alant, B. (2012). Understanding teenage food choices in a Durban high school with a view to improving praxis. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd (in press).

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**Figure 1: Linking the theories**



## Intervention

As you can see, the challenges that I face in trying to influence teenage food choices are many. I am one person, up against a global system of capitalism and economically acceptable marketing strategies. This task seems beyond me, and yet I feel that I have to try. Accepting the status quo of the situation goes against my professional educational values of honesty, integrity and promoting the well-being of my learners (Wood, 2009). These values have been a driving force not only in my own life but in trying to improve the lives of others. Yet, is it likely that I can have any influence on teenage food choices in this school? The fact that I may disapprove of overindulgence in junk food products may only add to their appeal. Also, as teenagers desire autonomy in making choices, any effort made by me to change teenage food choices in the school will probably be met by strong opposition from the teenagers themselves. I think it is likely that most teenagers are not aware of the fact that they are being exploited by the MNCs and the media. They are also not aware of the implications that this has for their present and future well-being. At the very least, by trying an intervention, I can try to raise awareness of this problem by pointing out to my learners how they are being targeted and exploited for financial gain.

## Methodology

Teenagers know better than adults what products will be acceptable to their peers. They are the experts in deciding what foods are socially and psychologically appropriate for teenagers (Wood, 2009). Based on this thinking, I decided to use action research (AR) to involve the learners themselves in finding ways in which I can influence food choice in this high school.

Action research is based on constructivism, and it became popular in the 1970s and 1980s as a tool for teachers to reflect and improve upon their own practice (McNiff, 2002). Action research is based on critical theory, and aims at revealing social exploitation so that participants can be made aware of the need to make the changes necessary for their own, and each other's well-being (Maree, 2007; McNiff, 2002). In action research, a research study is initiated by the researcher, in this case me, but the participants are involved in the implementation and analysis of the study (Hart, 1999). Through my intervention, I can raise



awareness of the exploitation of the teenagers by the MNCs so that they can then decide if they wish to make changes in their eating habits from an informed and empowered position. This could, in fact, lead to the development of an emancipatory pedagogy for teenage education on food choices (Wood, 2009). The use of AR as a methodology for my research is further supported by the strong focus on the autonomy of the participants (McNiff, 2002). This may appeal to the adolescents' need for autonomy as identified by Erikson (1959) in his identity theory.

## Selecting participants

In order to create an awareness and understanding of diabetes, a speaker from Diabetes SA addressed this topic at a school assembly. Learners interested in being involved in the research were then invited to collect application forms from their registrars. These forms included a detailed explanation of the research along with consent forms for both the parents and the learners. The school has a population of over 1,000 learners, of which 59 returned consent forms. From this number, 12 learners were selected to form a focus group. The rest of the volunteers were interviewed by the focus group to find out more about their food choices.

## Data collection

The data was collected at two levels, in order to collect two parallel sets of data that could be compared in the analysis (McTaggart, 1989). Level one involved the 12 learners in the focus group as co-researchers collecting data from their peers. At this level I hoped to achieve the first aim of my research, which was to find out what the teenagers in my school were actually eating for lunch. Since my research is based on the theory that teenagers will respond more to their peers than to teachers, this data was collected via daily interviews with other learners. These interviews were based on a simple questionnaire. Disposable cameras were given to the group members so that they could photograph the lunches of their peers. These pictures formed part of the record of the data collected, and were also used to validate the data collected by the group.

At level two the food choices of a group of learners became the subject of the research. Here I hoped to understand the influences on teenage food choices, so that I could find some way in which I could have a positive influence on those food choices. The group met once a week for six weeks, after school for two hours in the afternoon. The times and days of the meetings varied according to the extra-curricular involvement of the twelve learners. These meetings took the form of action-reflection cycles. At each meeting I investigated the learners' attitudes towards different foods, including cultural, low-GI and junk food options. The learners were filmed while making food choices, and then they reflected on the reasons for those choices (Whitehead, 2008). Questions that arose from the reflection helped to guide me towards the focus for the next meeting. Filming the focus group sessions ensured that I did not lose any of the students' facial expressions or comments as they sampled the various foods. Using film also allowed me to focus on the practical task of preparing the food and answering the learners' questions, giving me time for more thorough reflection later. I also observed the learners and took some notes, but found the film to be invaluable since it could be played back repeatedly to observe the learners' food choices and expressions. Using the film also allowed me to leave the room from time to time so that the learners were free to discuss the food without feeling in any way intimidated by me. The learners themselves took this opportunity to speak individually in front of the camera. This was initiated by them; I only discovered it when I watched the video later. This was an excellent way to record each participant's opinions and reactions to the food and to the research itself (McTaggart, 1989).

After eating, there was an informal group discussion on food, food choice, and factors affecting food choices, to allow the learners to reflect on and theorise about their food choices. The purpose was to help them to form an understanding of the relationship between their food choices and diabetes. This was also a



time for informal open discussion on the reasons behind making those particular food choices. These meetings were also recorded for later analysis (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Summary of focus group meetings**

Session	Title	Purpose	Action	Reflection
1	What's in the lunchbox?	To explore learners' reactions to different foods.	Learners were asked to choose a lunchbox then open it to see what is inside.	Focus group discussed attitudes to different foods and reflected on their own reactions.
2	Healthy food choice?	To understand learners' perceptions of healthy foods.	Learners were asked to bring food in the lunchbox that they considered to be healthy.	Focus group examined food labels for additives, fat and sugar. They discussed their views about healthy foods.
3	Competing with the tuck shop.	To find out if the learners will choose healthy foods over junk foods at the school tuck shop.	Learners were given money to spend at the tuck shop and then they had to comment on their choices.	Focus group reflected the reasons for their choices. Influence of the media, advertising and MNCs were also discussed.
4	Glycaemic Index.	To introduce the learners to the concept of the glycaemic index.	Learners researched the GI index. They had to choose between foods that were high GI and foods that were low GI.	Once again, the focus group reflected on the reasons for their choices.
5	Choosing 'cool' foods.	To understand social factors behind the learners' food choices.	Learners made a list of low-GI foods that may be popular choices in the tuck shop.	Focus group made suggestions on a plan of action to introduce the concept of low GI foods to the school.
6.	Junk food: the healthy alternative.	To explore the learners' reactions to healthier foods.	Learners ate hamburgers that were low fat, high fibre and low GI.	The group discussed the acceptability of a healthy alternative to junk food.

## Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the research was sought and granted by the ethics committee at Edgewood teacher training campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and the Department of Education. The principal, as the gatekeeper to the school, also granted permission. A letter of consent was signed by the parents and all of the learners who participated. A letter was also sent to the parents explaining the purpose of the research and what would take place at each of the meetings. The following ethical measures were taken to protect the identity of the learners:

In level one, the identity of the learners was protected by using numbered wristbands placed beside the lunchboxes instead of photographing the learners themselves (see Image 2). This protected individuals from any embarrassment when the lunchboxes were analysed. It also prevented judgments on food based

on racial or gender bias. They were also promised that their faces would also not be visible in the edited video.

**Image 2: Example of a lunchbox photographed in level one**



In level two the learners were invited to use pseudonyms throughout the filming. They were also promised that their faces would also not be visible in the edited video. They were also told that they were under no obligation to continue with the research if they did not wish to, and that they could withdraw at any time (Maree, 2007).

## Findings

As this research contains a vast amount of data, for the purpose of this paper I will only give a brief outline of the main findings. Instead I will focus on an explanation of how I developed a living theory to answer my research question.

### Level one

Data from the questionnaire was recorded, and the photos taken with the disposable cameras were compared to the questionnaire results and information on the consent forms. The main aim of this comparison was to validate the results of the questionnaire.

Most of the learners involved in the research brought packed lunches to school. However, as the title of the research was “What’s in the lunchbox?” it is possible that the learners who regularly purchase food from the tuck shop did not take part, as they don’t actually eat from a lunchbox. The lunches of the learners who were interviewed by the focus group were usually prepared by a parent or guardian. Although some of the learners said that the food packed for them was not their first choice, they ate what was packed because they were hungry and had no other option. This demonstrates the importance of parental care even for older children. Although teenagers are capable of preparing their own lunches, many don’t plan ahead of time and run out of time to prepare lunch themselves in the morning.

Almost all of the lunches contained white bread rather than brown or wholewheat bread. Given that white bread has a high GI and is much lower in nutrient value than wholewheat, white bread should not be consumed on a daily basis. However, if a high-GI food item is eaten at the same time as a low-GI food item, the blood sugar levels do not go as high as they do with eating the high-GI food on its own. Furthermore,

the inclusion of any protein or fat in a sandwich will delay the rapid increase of blood sugar levels and lead to more sustainable nutrition. High-GI snacks such as biscuits and sweets were also normally included. Unfortunately, these are the most refined carbohydrates and sugars, and therefore their inclusion in the lunchboxes could have the worst effect on blood sugar levels, besides which the extra kilojoules obtained will increase the risk of obesity.

## Level two

The film was transcribed to record all discussions, body language and facial expressions, and the transcripts were scanned for possible themes. The following are the main themes that emerged:

- Junk food is the food of choice among teenagers at school;
- There is a stigma attached to eating left-overs from home;
- Junk food bought from the tuck shop is used to buy some friendships, and to exclude others;
- Being seen eating junk food regularly automatically places teenagers in the 'cool' group;
- Coke is the favourite beverage; and
- The packaging sells the product.

These findings confirm the trilogy of theories which I used to explain teenage food choice in this high school. However, I felt a sense of dismay at the end of the eight weeks when I realised that the teenagers in the focus group were still making unhealthy food choices, despite having being taught about the risks this would pose to their future health.

However, the focus of this article is on what I learnt from a critical analysis of my own influence as an educator. The question of how I – or educators in my position – can influence teenage food choices poses an enigma. At the outset of my empirical research it seemed obvious to me that I merely had to inform the teenage learners about the exploitative tactics of MNCs, and they would be convinced enough to avoid these products. I used a co-researcher with an honours degree in media and communication to film the sessions. However, at times I felt irritated that while he was filming, he turned the camera to focus on me. I kept insisting that he turn the camera away, since the students were the subjects of my research, not I. It wasn't until I was reviewing the film that I realised the importance of my own role in seeking an answer to my research question.

Seeing myself on camera as others see me invoked a variety of emotions. My initial feeling was one of self-consciousness, as this was me in the raw, unstaged and ungroomed for a film in which I so obviously was playing a leading role. This gave way to curiosity, as I watched myself integrate with and motivate the students. Finally, although this was something that I felt I could only admit to myself, I experienced a feeling of intrigue as I became fascinated by the way in which I used my body language and facial expressions as a tool in communicating with the students (Whitehead, 2008). For the first time, in all my years of teaching, I understood how I brought my lessons to life through my passion for teaching.

When I embarked on this research I planned to collect data on teenage food choices in the school. I did not consider that I would be reflecting on my own practice as part of my analysis of the data collected. Even when I had watched the film, I did not see any relevant link between me as a person, and teenage food choice. However, as I reflected on my practice, I came to realise that my role as a teacher in the classroom

could in itself have a major impact on teenage food choice. I was influenced by the work of Jack Whitehead (2008) and his concept of living theory. In Whitehead's (2008) own words:

A living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work (p.104).

According to Whitehead, living theory embodies the values of the teacher and acts as a driving force to precipitate social change. These values stem from a belief and sense of what is right, just and fair in society. They fuel the passion and energy that flows from teachers as they attempt to ignite a similar passion in the students (Whitehead, 2008). By using Whitehead's living theory approach to analyse my own role in my research, I have learnt things about myself that enable me to reflect on my own teaching practice, with a view to improving that practice for the benefit of the learners' well-being.

I found that my emphasis on important points, my facial expressions and my somewhat exaggerated body language all added to the impact of my words. I exuded passion as I taught the learners about the value of choosing low-GI foods. Below is a link to a video clip taken during one of the focus group meetings in which I am explaining to the learners the effect that high-GI foods have on blood sugar levels (see Video 1). I hope that you can see that the life-flowing energy that I emit is testimony to my concern about the risk of diabetes to my learners (Whitehead, 2008).

#### **Video 1: How high GI foods affect blood sugar levels**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZe-6anJfEk>

The use of this video clip allows you as the reader to see the energy that flows from me as I try to explain to the learners the importance of eating low-GI food.

Yet I am a fake. I speak of values that are important to me, expecting that my students will follow my example. When the camera turns on me, I see a *living contradiction* with the values that I teach (Whitehead, 2008; McNiff, 2008). My eating habits have become erratic. I do not take regular exercise. I regularly indulge in foods that I know are not good for my well-being (I have eaten more chocolate in the past three years than in the preceding 20). In fact, the irony of conducting research into teenage food choice has left me with a weight gain of over 20 kg. I have become what I do not want my students to be: a high risk for chronic dietary-related conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Below is a link to a video which bears testimony to this (see Video 2). The audio recording was made during one of the focus group sessions. I am clearly advising the learners about making healthy food choices and exercising to avoid the onset of diabetes, yet my physical appearance tells a story of a person who could be at high risk of developing diabetes herself.

#### **Video 2: Me as a living contradiction**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXHjajhNQDU>

I ask myself again: How can I influence teenage food choice, especially as I do not practice what I preach? In order for action researchers to be taken seriously, everything that they do and say inside and outside the classroom must reflect their values (Wood, 2009). If I claim to value honesty, integrity and the well-being of my learners, then am I being honest when I tell them that I make healthy food choices? Does my

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appearance stand as a testimony to my integrity as an advocator of healthy food choices? How can I claim to be concerned about my learners' well-being when I appear to be unconcerned about my own? Perhaps, in order to engage the learners in my school in making healthy food choices, I need to demonstrate that I value my own well-being as much as I want them to value theirs.

This values-based self-reflection is cutting, but necessary if I am to improve my approach to teaching and advising learners about healthy food choices (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Additionally, seeing myself as a living contradiction to the values that I believe in helps me to empathise with and understand the lived reality of the learners when making their own food choices (Whitehead, 2008; Wood, 2009). Furthermore, the humiliation of posting video clips on the internet attesting to the reality of my weight gain and inviting public critique should add validity to my claims that I value honesty and integrity. Even you, as the reader, may feel somewhat uncomfortable with my self-criticism. However, I have rechannelled the negative, potentially destructive emotions that I feel when watching myself on video into a flow of life affirming energy in my teaching (Whitehead, 2008). Finally, by sharing my struggle and quest with my learners I may influence their thinking in such a way that they question and critique their own food choices as a result. The third video link below was taken from a recording during the fourth focus group meeting (see Video 3). In this recording, one of the learners critiques the role of the media and how it influences teenage food choice.

### **Video 3: Learner's critique of the role of the media in teenage food choice.**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR5PWB9keDk>

It is obvious that this learner has been reflecting on what I have taught him about global influences on teenage food choices, and as a result has become what I wanted him to be: a critical consumer of junk foods. The energy, the passion and the values which I tried to convey during the focus group sessions flowed through to him in a way that taught him to view junk food in a different way. The seed of discontent has been sown in his mind. This video clip adds validity to my claim that by reflecting and theorising on my practice, I have developed a living theory to explain how I can influence teenage food choice in this South African high school (Whitehead, 2009). In the words of McNiff, "The idea of living an educational theory ... is important ... as a person is able to engage critically with their own thinking, and seek to influence the thinking of others in an educational way, a way that nurtures further learning." (McNiff, 2008, p.1)

This then, answers my research question: how can I influence teenage food choice in this South African High school? I offer this living theory that I have generated as an answer to this enigma. As an individual, I cannot compete with or change the current social order or the powerful psychological attraction of teenagers to junk food. My own theoretical framework can therefore only offer an explanation of these powerful influences on teenage food choice in general, and of my influences on my own learners (Whitehead, 2008).

## **Implications**

The results of this study show the importance of reflecting on my practice in order to generate a living theory as an explanation of my influence of teenage food choices. The inclusion of group discussions on global influences on teenage food choice is an important part in nutrition education. Through these discussions the learners develop the skills to become critical consumers of junk food. This in turn can lead them to reflect on their own values and food choices. In so doing, they are empowered to choose foods that will maintain blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of developing lifestyle diseases such as diabetes. By sharing my own values with them, and the cognitive dissonance I experience as I realise that I am not

living them out, I can also help them to interrogate their values around healthy eating and if they are making choices appropriate to them.

Jansen (2010) wrote that he is “prepared to bet that there is a [positive] relationship between the body language of a teacher and the performance levels of her learners”. The significance of body language and facial expressions as a means of influencing learning should therefore be stressed as an important point in teacher training.

Some of the learners in the focus group are members of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) in the school. As the RCL already has a good system of communication with the learners, this may be the perfect springboard from which to launch the message of healthy food choice and diabetes prevention to the rest of the school learner body. This would also give all of the learners in the school some autonomy when deciding on healthy alternatives to junk foods for the school tuck shop. Some of these learners have responded positively and through the RCL have taken up the challenge to change attitudes towards healthier food choices in the school. As part of the school management team, I have written a policy document for the school tuck shop based on the results of this research. If implemented, this could influence teenage food choice in this high school. If we succeed, perhaps this model can be adopted in other South African high schools. Therefore, there is scope for further research to be conducted on influencing teenage food choices in South Africa.

## Conclusion

I began the story of my journey with my concern about the food choices of my learners. Literature led me to the fact that in the past twenty years there has been an increase in the number of people with diabetes in Southern Africa. I sought to understand this by using a trilogy of theories that work together to underpin teenage food choice. As a Consumer Studies teacher, I recognised that I have a social responsibility towards the well-being of my learners. This motivated me to ask, “How can I influence the food choices of the teenagers in this South African high school?” To find an answer to this problem, I embarked on empirical research in the school in which I teach. I used a methodology of action research to involve twelve of the learners from the school in a focus group. Film was used to capture data during weekly sessions.

The results show that the theoretical framework that I applied could be used to explain global influences on teenage food choice. The passion I displayed while teaching flowed through to the learners in the focus group, enabling them to become critical consumers of ‘junk’ foods and the marketing tactics of MNCs. This resulted in some of the learners in the RCL actively trying to change attitudes towards healthy food in the school. However, although the body language I used during my teaching expressed my values of honesty, integrity and concern for the well-being of my learners, on reflection I became aware that I am a living contradiction of the values that I teach. Perhaps, then, my physical appearance should attest to my belief in making healthy food choices so as to prevent diabetes. This realisation has helped me to see how I, myself, should be making healthier food choices if I want the learners to follow suit. In so doing, I have developed a living theory to explain how I can influence teenage learners to make healthier food choices in this school.

## Note

This research was conducted as part of a masters degree at the school of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education at the Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. Déirdre Kroone is the main author of the following article, which was written and edited under the guidance, encouragement and support of her supervisor Busisiwe Alant.



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**Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)**

**Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012**

**pp. 85-95**

**[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)**

**ISSN: 2221-4070**

## **How Do I Assist in Enterprise Development through Action Research?**

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### **Abstract**

Many South Africans are seeking social and economic independence and security by trying to create their own businesses, often due to financial insecurity, unemployment or poverty. In this paper, I describe how I developed my practice to support emerging entrepreneurs. I explain the interventions I designed and report on their implementation. I also provide evidence of the benefits that such an approach has had on my own learning and practice.

**Keywords:** Self Employment, Entrepreneurship, Action Research, Living Theory Methodology.

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### **Introduction**

In this article I describe my use of action research to continually assess my coaching/mentoring work with emerging entrepreneurs. The reason why I have chosen this approach is because through action research I am able to describe the interventions that I have devised, report on their implementation, report on the evolution of new perceptions and understandings that have developed as a result, provide evidence of the educational influence of these interventions, reflect critically on what has been done and achieved, and critically assess the way forward. In this way I have chosen to engage in critical reflective interrogation of my practice as a coach and mentor to emerging entrepreneurs because I believe that critical analysis and reflection is how ideas develop and practice improves (McNiff, 2002). In this paper I will show evidence of the benefits that action research has in and on my work.

### **Background to the Study**

After completing my Diploma in Fashion Design at the Durban University of Technology (then the Durban Institute of Technology) in 1993, I started my own children's clothing range from a room in my home. I borrowed R500 from my mother to purchase three industrial sewing machines and some fabric to produce children's swimwear. I started the business by selling at flea markets. The catalyst for me to produce what has become among the most significantly marketable children's clothing in South Africa was a specific comment I received: "You need to offer your market something different". I immediately began to explore

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how I could do this. I decided to create my own fabrics by painting on white textiles and then manufacturing that into children's wear. In no time I had customers knocking on my door to buy my children's wear range. My ability as a textile designer grew with time as did my natural creative ability to produce striking and attractive designs on the textiles.

The business grew very rapidly; I started to employ people and children's wear boutiques around South Africa started to buy from me. I had no training in business administration or finance and this side of the business was very difficult for me. I just wanted to create beautiful clothing for children. The administration of the business was therefore often neglected and it was not a priority for me.

It was at the height of my success as a children's wear company owner that I realised I would prefer to inspire others to become business owners. I had an employee in whom I instinctively recognised a leaning towards entrepreneurship. I decided to teach him how to run his own business by sharing my knowledge with him. I taught him everything including pattern making, painting, sewing and financial management (using the simple methods I had devised for myself). My employee started his own company in 2001. He used everything I had taught him to do this. His company is still a viable concern. He now owns a vehicle and employs staff to paint on fabric and manufacture his children's wear. Chrisman & McMullan (2000) in Storey suggest that it is the "unique attributes" (p. 231) of the entrepreneurs or ventures studied that make them more likely to succeed. I recognised those unique attributes in this person.

I started to reflect deeply about my strong leaning towards wanting social and economic transformation for people who had not had the opportunities that I had had in life. I agree with Johannisson (2002) who says "recognising entrepreneurship as interactive construction of both venture and context means accepting the potency of human willpower, belief and accountability as crucial for social change" (p. 3). I could see myself in this transforming role and this was important to me.

I realised I was very strongly influenced by my father who was a humanitarian and a human rights lawyer in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. His arguments for equality and justice in our home affected my life and the life of my siblings. My own thoughts on social and economic injustice began at a very early age. I could not tolerate the vast gap between the rich and the poor. I agree with Whitehead (2008) who asserts that the importance of improving his practice is "grounded in a passion to see values of freedom, justice, compassion, respects for persons, love and democracy lived as fully as possible"(p.436).

## **Entrepreneurship: Context, Culture and Self**

I have extensive previous small business experience, specifically in the clothing and textiles industry, and in the mentoring and coaching of others in entrepreneurship. Since 2003, I have occupied a managerial position in a university of technology that promotes entrepreneurship in the clothing and textiles industry.

Since 2005, I have been engaged in project which manages the training of people, many of whom have degrees yet cannot find employment, and who are trying to become self-employed through the Clothing, Textiles, Footwear and Leather Sector Education Training Authority (CTFL SETA) New Venture Creation (NVC) projects. My purpose in my NVC work is aligned with Kunene (2008) who informs us that Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME) development forms an important element of the South African government's "active strategy to ensure mobility between the first and second economies" (p. 3). The purpose of this strategy is to help alleviate poverty, create profitable opportunities for indigenous entrepreneurs, and create wealth for previously disadvantaged people (p. 3).

Initially I engaged a training provider to facilitate the NVC programme while I managed the project from a distance. On critical reflection I now realise the irony that I delegated the task of mentoring to someone

else because I did not have the confidence to facilitate the NVC programme myself even though I have a proven track record in this field. Johannisson (2002) argues that academics who have come from a background of small business and entrepreneurship “often silence the insight” (p. 2) they have gained through this experience and how they created their knowledge. I now realise that this is exactly what I did. From 2005 until 2010, I silenced my experience, capacity and my passion to help people empower themselves. But, even though I was personally silencing myself, I continued to make sure that other people did the work for me of facilitating entrepreneurship development. I ran four business establishment programmes which trained more than 80 people to run their own businesses. The NVC certificates were awarded on condition of the presentation of a viable business plan.

I had to send reports to the funders on the progress of those who had been through the NVC programme. I soon realised a high percentage of the people identified in the NVC project had been unable to maintain or even begin their own enterprise. This was due to a range of obstacles, such as access to suitable markets, promotion, supply of materials and other logistical issues. On reflection, I came to realise some shortcomings of my initial training programme, for example, that I just trained people in entrepreneurship for a short course, then let them go without any follow-up on their progress. I realised I had inappropriate assumptions about the success of the initial NVC training. My deeply ingrained determination to help others succeed drove me to acquire more funding to take the group a step further. The determination comes from my humanitarian nature. I am acutely aware of the possibility that I could fall prey to a patronising or colonising attitude. I make a point of reflecting on my practice constantly in order to prevent myself falling into the trap of thinking I must fish for people instead of making a space for them to learn to fish for themselves. I only feel that I have succeeded in my endeavours when my mentees are out in their own fishing boats in choppy waters and bringing home a full catch.

Outsider mentoring assistance can lead to the transmission of knowledge that provides a basis for sustainable competitive advantage which, in turn, promotes the survival and good performance of ventures. An American study by Chrisman & McMullan (2004, p. 229) assessed the impact that the American Small Business Development Corporation’s coaching and mentoring interventions have had over a period of three to five years. This reveals a large number of new ventures not only surviving but growing well in sales and employment. The same study reports that when the people involved were mentored or coached, the new ventures also produced a significant number of innovations.

During the time that I have been coaching and mentoring, I have observed that pre-venture candidates learn valuable lessons when starting their businesses with a coach or mentor. I have observed them as they have gained a deeper appreciation of strategic planning for competitive advantage and market position and innovation. In South Africa, most people who start small businesses are driven by a need to survive, but lack an appreciation of what it takes to succeed. They generally believe that technical knowledge and hard work are the sole requirements for success (Pretorius & Włodarczyk, 2007). Davies (2002) highlights the fact that acquiring skills specific to SMMEs is seldom achieved through structured learning, but rather through the process of skills formation. Pretorius & Włodarczyk (2007) believe that entrepreneurship can be taught. I believe that mentoring coupled with training can enhance business endeavours. Pretorius (2004) hypothesises that if a training process is “improved to be more applicable and practical by becoming a learning process, more entrepreneurs will enter, succeed and contribute to the economic growth so desperately needed” (p. 4).

Pretorius & van Vuuren (2003, p. 514) discuss entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and start-up culture to create economic development. Despite the efforts made in South Africa, the concept of an entrepreneurial culture to improve EO is not addressed. Pretorius & Van Vuuren further hypothesise that emerging entrepreneurs do not have enough courage, motivation, locus of control or enough role models to become successful business owners (p. 526). The key questions to be asked by emerging entrepreneurs, according to them, are how does fear of failure influence the courage and energy to start a small business? How can a

small business start slowly with minimum funding and grow? How does an unknown business find its market in today's competitive environment?

I believe the general mindset should change from one of needing to find employment to one of being self-employed. I have seen first-hand poverty and unemployment in Durban, where I live and work. If there is no employment, there is no alternative but to create self-employment. This observation drives me to take the work I do very seriously.

## **The Social and Economic Transformative Aspects of the Study**

In respect of social and economic transformation, the Global Entrepreneur Monitor (GEM) report (De Wett & Freemantle, p. 246) also found that South Africa's potential entrepreneurs lack the mindset and skills to become truly entrepreneurial and only 5% are involved in starting a new business. The work I do with emerging entrepreneurs supports this observation. The members of my groups lack confidence and struggle. The lack of confidence, I think, comes from not having a natural entrepreneurial mindset, having no or limited computer skills or financial administration skills, and from a sense of urgency to make enough money to live on. The group members are aware that the employment opportunities are rare.

I agree with Johannisson (2002) who says "recognising entrepreneurship as interactive construction of both venture and context means accepting the potency of human willpower, belief and accountability as crucial for social change" (p. 3). The members of the group who keep coming back to the workshops and have a hunger for learning more to establish and sustain their businesses are the ones who have this willpower and belief. They recognise how crucial it is to succeed and become self-employed.

I believe that the development of entrepreneurs needs to be treated with a sense of urgency in order to speed up the rate of social and economic transformation and address unemployment and the high rate of poverty, particularly in my home city. For this reason I set up weekly coaching workshops for entrepreneurs in order to create an environment for personal and business growth, recognising that the emerging entrepreneurs need a space for exploring their strengths and weaknesses in order to improve their potential to become successful entrepreneurs.

This is why I take the training, coaching and mentoring that I do in my weekly workshops very seriously. This is also why I make myself available to anyone in the group at any time in order to support and advise if they ask for it. This is also why I recognise that my previous business experience is invaluable and that includes the failures and mistakes I made while running my business. The instances when I also lack confidence and feel powerless are important to acknowledge, because I feel empathy when others experience the same sort of feelings while trying to take control of their own social and economic upliftment.

The coaching and mentoring I do is informed by the needs of each individual. Even though I plan each workshop and cover all aspects of managing a small business, I also arrive at the workshop with an open mind to the needs of the group. They arrive at the workshop with concerns and problems about managing their businesses and I use those as an opportunity for mentoring, training and coaching. I remain conscious and critically reflective about managing my potentially patronising or colonising attitude. I was accused of colonising when I offered funded NVC training to another group in Durban. When I expressed my concern about this to a Zulu colleague, he assured me that because he is highly qualified, there are times when he is accused of being patronising. I want to put the message across to the people I mentor and coach that my transformation and liberation is indeed tied up with theirs (cf. Stringer, 2007). My aim is to coach entrepreneurs to develop appropriate business philosophy, skills, tools and knowledge to run the business. The purpose of this project is to provide the type of support described earlier.



## The Need for Practical Business Skills Training

The learner-entrepreneurs have had the theory and limited practice of running a small business under the guidance of the NVC programme. The challenges for independent entrepreneurs of establishing real-world enterprises on completion of the NVC programme are considerable, and ongoing management, support, coaching, training and mentorship are required to ensure success. In order to succeed, learner-entrepreneurs require intensive support and training in the rigorous requirements of quality and supply chain management, computer skills and marketing. The development of these technical skills has been identified as critical to ensuring that the new ventures succeed.

The NVC Management Programme was implemented in 2009 and focuses on business coaching. All the previous NVC programme participants were invited to the business coaching workshops. I engaged the services of a business coach from Action Coach. The decision to use a business coach was a good one and I was able to maintain my distance as the project manager. The learner-entrepreneurs working with the business coach had some positive results. Evaluation forms which were handed out at the end of each coaching workshop. Some answers to the evaluation question, "What did I learn from the coaching session?" included

- Ways of approaching customers. Questions one can ask to benefit sales and marketing.
- Where do you fish? This talks about the target market.
- How to find prospective clients, advice was invaluable.
- How to deal with clients, when to ask questions.
- Selling and making things aren't going to do happen by themselves, it takes the person to stand up and do it.
- The importance of goal setting and self reflection. Importance of listening.
- How to deal with clients, selling methods, different types of clients. Spending time wisely with correct clients.

Some of the group also acquired motor vehicle licences and one participant bought herself a car to use in her business. Two participants rented premises to work from instead of working from home because, in their words, "After the coaching training we want to become more professional".

In action coaching terms we understand that people venturing into small business development operate above or below "the line" (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Action Coaching**

<p><b>Ownership, Accountability, Responsibility</b></p> <p><b>ABOVE THE LINE</b></p>
<p><b>BELOW THE LINE</b></p> <p><b>Blame, Excuses, Denial</b></p>

The point of the mentoring intervention was to get the participants to operate above the line. One of the interventions was to introduce the group members to the effects of reflecting on their actions, enabling them to operate above the line.

The NVC management group, the coach and I developed the following goals for the group. As a result of our new perceptions and understandings we agreed to develop a set of attainable goals and worked on them together:

- To reach a turnover of R240,000 per annum within the first two years of business;
- To reach a profitability of 25% year on year from year 2;
- To contain money in the business (i.e. not to waste money);
- To acquire a driver's licence and a vehicle within one year of business starting;
- To work from premises which are rented or bought;
- To use "best practice" in business;
- To sustain the business for five years, thereafter seek ways to grow the business;
- To create employment;
- To assist new entrepreneurs coming into the NVC Best Practice Programme; and
- To set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results, Timeframes (SMART) goals.

## **Methodology**

### **My Living Theory generated out of my action research**

By following Whitehead's (2008) formula and asking the question "How do I improve my practice as the facilitator of the NVC programmes?", I needed a method in which my internal decision making in this context would be valid, scholarly and systematic. I approached my new role as coach and mentor from the perspective of my current and past experiences. My enquiry is grounded in values which inform my practice and which are used to validate my emerging theory (Whitehead, 2008). Whitehead encourages the autobiography of learning where one's present practice is explained and evaluated by past practices. This is done with the intention of creating a "better future" which is not yet in existence (p. 4).

Whitehead also emphasises the importance of uniqueness of each individual's inventiveness in asking, researching and answering the question, "how do I improve my practice?" I hoped to improve my practice of assisting the emerging entrepreneurs to embrace self-interrogation which will encourage "above the line" thinking as a matter of course which will result in successful self-employment and creating employment for others. I endeavoured to "inculcate entrepreneurial mindsets, provide necessary skills and assist with creating the right conditions for their enterprises to grow" (CSI Handbook, n.d., p. 247). The reason for wanting to improve my practice as a coach to emerging entrepreneurs is grounded in my desire to inspire, facilitate and encourage entrepreneurs to be successful. I value empowerment of myself and others and put my values into practice through the workshops for entrepreneurs to create social and economic independence.

In other words, I wish to facilitate the self-empowerment of people who are often forced to become self-employed because of the current lack of formal employment in South Africa.

### **My Lived Experience as a Coach, Mentor and Trainer**

I had no choice but to do the coaching myself when there was no more funding to pay for the business coach. When this happened, I was motivated by not wanting my efforts to come to naught. I believe my wealth of experience is now being used while I attempt to assist emerging entrepreneurs in the clothing sector of Durban. As a result of my desire to improve what I am doing, I have been devising interventions intended to address the perceived gaps in my original training plan. In the process, I have gained further insights into a field of business that I thought I knew thoroughly, and have learned much about the people I train, their capacities and needs, and their life circumstances.

The group met with me every Wednesday and I used the model of the action reflection cycle in the coaching workshops for myself and taught the group about it as well, aiming to develop their own “living theories” (Whitehead, 2008, p. 1). I encouraged them to ask themselves the question, “How do I improve my practice as an emerging entrepreneur and business owner?”

The interventions focussed on the following aspects:

#### *Developing a Personal Brand*

I tentatively began working with the group by assisting them to develop a personal brand in order to enhance their business brand. Working on their personal brand took four weeks. It was instinctual for me to start the group with something personal to build a foundation for a business brand. I discovered that by observing entrepreneurs like Richard Branson, the founder of Virgin, and the Durban designer Karen Monk Klinjstra, who has created a personal brand by wearing her own unusual designs. Richard Branson uses high-profile, attention-seeking escapades to enhance his personal brand and this in turn reminds the public of the Virgin brand.

During the workshop process, I became consciously aware of the fact that I have the ability to ignite and inspire passion and determination in others. I also realised I was more interested in developing and empowering others than being a successful entrepreneur myself. Ben Zander (2002), conductor of the Boston Philharmonic orchestra, teacher and communicator, says that a conductor’s work is to make people powerful. His philosophy resonates with my own. “Power” here is not meant in the negative sense of control. It is positive in the sense that I have observed in myself and in the NVC group the times when we feel powerless because of the hardship we face in enterprise development and creating self-employment. The notion can be daunting and almost debilitating until someone inspires confidence and says “you *can* do it”. It is the positive power of mutual encouragement and belief.

#### *Developing Values and Principles*

I wanted the group members to understand their own personal values and principles and operate their businesses with those in mind to improve their practice as a new business owner. To achieve this, I required them to respond to Brown’s (1994) seven key questions:

- What are my values?
- Where do they come from?
- What did I do?
- Why did I do it?

- What happened?
- What does this tell me about my personal brand?
- What remains unresolved?
- What does this tell me about where my personal brand comes from?

To achieve this, I required them to respond to Brown's (1994) eight questions to their context.

As I personally battled with discovering my own values and principles, it became clear to me that more insight was needed to grasp the idea of values and principles and to better integrate them into the foundation of our business and personal lives. Together, we thought of words that relate to values and principles, including justice, fairness, love and equal opportunity. I say "together" because even though I coach and facilitate the workshops, I do the work myself as well and continue to learn and improve my practice by being involved in this way.

I took a canvas, brushes and paints to the next workshop. We painted the roots of a tree and each person wrote their own values and principles within the roots. I explained that this was symbolic of creating a strong foundation for our personal and business lives. As we develop our brands, business plans and actual businesses, the symbolic tree will grow. During some of the workshops we continued to paint the rest of the tree with more words and symbols.

#### *The Need to Reflect Continuously*

After a few weeks, and with critical reflection, assessment and continuous evaluation as described by McNiff (2002), I realised that I needed to get the group to personify their business plans to make them part of their lived experience (Whitehead, 2008). By doing this, a business plan becomes reachable, and a part of their lives and mine.

I reiterated the point that because they are personifying and taking ownership and responsibility of their businesses, they need to continuously use the action research cycle (McNiff, 2002) of looking, thinking and acting which implies that the strategy will change with seeing what works and what does not work. I explained that their business plans are documents that have to grow and change all the time. I personally believe that a business plan is never complete, just like the business; it has energy and daily action. That is why using the action reflection cycle should work well in the ongoing process of running a business and keeping the business plan current. I have not yet tested this theory.

#### *Developing a Marketing Letter*

I decided to begin the business plan with an action that would immediately benefit participants' businesses. My own experience shows that the most important part of starting a business is the marketing and finding at least one customer. For this reason a marketing letter must be created; this would meet my goal that participants leave the workshop each week with something tangible. Personally, I needed to develop a marketing letter to attract more funders to grow the NVC coaching programme.

Once we had completed our marketing letters, I made copies for each person to take with them. They had their first tool with which to approach potential customers. Stringer (2007) writes of an aboriginal social worker who spoke to a group of non-aboriginal social workers and said, "If you've come to help me, you're wasting your time. But if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work

together” (p. 194). Stringer writes that the researcher becomes the facilitator who “acts as a catalyst” (p. 24) to assist stakeholders in defining their problems clearly and then to support them to implement them. While we were working on our marketing letters individually and together (when we needed to bounce ideas off each other), I liked the fact that I was writing my own marketing letter while the group was writing theirs. I am always conscious of coming across as being patronising, colonial and from an advantaged background. I believe that my personal growth and development, improving my practice and my liberation is bound up with those with whom I work in the mentoring and coaching programmes.

The feedback attained from students on the evaluation forms collected after each coaching workshop, indicate that they found this exercise to be empowering. I have not altered the grammar or spelling used by the participants.

“I would like to thank you for teaching me how to draft the broucher and also do the attachment and its very exciting. thank you again”

“Today I learnt how to design a flyer and market my company. It was exciting and used my creative side. I am actually hopeful, the steps we are making are just enough and not overwhelming. You make business easy. I am sometimes not sure how to begin this is helping. Thank you”

The above quotes confirm for me that through my interventions the group members are beginning to think like entrepreneurs and are becoming conscious of being professional businesspeople when sending emails or letters. I wanted an outcome that would equip the group with tools for running a business, such as brochures, marketing letters and letterheads. The participants produced these documents and are using them. That is a sign of success and empowerment for me.

### *Getting Connected*

The reflexive cycle (McNiff, 2002) continued and I had to plan the workshop for the following week. At the next workshop I made sure that each person had a free webmail address. I believe that having an email address is an important tool to communicate with potential customers. I observed a sense of pride and achievement among those participants who successfully acquired their first email addresses. I helped some, and those who were competent on the computer helped others until everyone had an email address. Each week we sent out marketing letters and built up a database of contacts. I asked the group to measure the success of these by noting the change in turnover and profit after the first stage of marketing was implemented. Ben Zander (2010) talks of people having shining eyes when they achieve, learn and gain confidence. I saw the shining eyes in my group, I sensed their enthusiasm and confidence growing and I hope to see their bank balances growing too. This is an aspect of empowerment: economic transformation that takes place with the success of their businesses.

After the first week of using professional marketing letters with logos, three members had success stories to report on. One of them had obtained a big contract in a group of private hospitals in Durban. He said he had been trying to obtain this contract for months and explained that the marketing letter with a logo and his contact details gave him more credibility. These successes of the group inspired me to improve my practice, and by using the action research cycle I was able to use my creativity to develop more tools to share with the group to improve their business practice.

### *Honing Computer Skills*

On reflection, I noted that many in the group had very weak computer skills and saw this as another opportunity to develop skills. Those with very poor computer skills worked at their own pace, while the more skilled members of the group spontaneously helped the less adept ones. When observing this, I realised that as much as I may plan the workshops for each week, the workshops will also develop a life of their own, making me realise that I needed to be flexible and allow the process to unfold. One of the participants commented:

“I have learnt that if I am sending an email to a professional person I must not say Hi!”

### *Developing Policies and Procedures*

We continued working with the marketing strategy of the business plan in tandem with other aspects of their business that require input. Participants brought their business concerns and problems to the workshops and we dealt with them. For example, two members who had made samples of clothing for a customer had many issues and problems with that customer. We started the workshop by discussing the issue and agreed to develop rules of engagement for their customers before the end of the workshop. A document of policies and procedures was developed for their business including, for example, the payment of a deposit before any samples or orders were accepted, an invoice with descriptions and signatures, and so on. All these documents include the participants' letterheads and contact details. This ensures that their brand has cohesion and is recognised.

## **Conclusion**

Chrisman & McMullan (2004, p. 240) argue that outsider assistance can lead to the creation of knowledge that provides the basis for sustainable competitive advantage which will, in turn, influence venture survival and performance. The reality, however, is that many emerging entrepreneurs have several obstacles to face before their business can become sustainable, even with outsider assistance. These obstacles include, for example, accessing finance, finding a suitable market, and finding suitable premises. This requires determination, tenacity and hope, traits I identified in this NVC group. I as the “outsider” assisting the group have a very big responsibility: to create the space for entrepreneur development by continually following the action reflection cycle in order to improve my practice as a business coach, mentor and trainer. Questions that remain unresolved for now are, what else must I introduce? How much of me is in this process? Should I attempt to start my own business again so that I experience the same process as my group? Am I going about transformation to self-employment in the right way?

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<sup>4</sup> This reference was obtained from Trialogue after a telephonic conversation.

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**Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012**

**pp. 96-97**

**[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)**

**ISSN: 2221-4070**

## **REPORT**

### **Report on the Action Research and Self-Study (ARaSS) Special Interest Group (SIG) at the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA)**

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The Action Research and Self-Study (ARaSS) Special Interest Group (SIG) was established at a meeting held on Thursday, December 1, 2011 at the Missionvale Campus of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University during the 2011 Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA) annual conference. The ARaSS SIG focuses on all aspects of Action Research and Self-Study as practitioner-research approaches, which address social and educational issues.

At the introductory meeting, 15 people representing 12 higher education institutions in three countries—South Africa, the UK and Kenya—attended. Lesley Wood (NMMU), Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (UKZN) and Omar Esau (Stellenbosch) were nominated to form the ARaSS SIG committee. The co-ordinator has yet to be identified.

We introduced ourselves to each other and talked about the nature of action research and self-study, and agreed that we were dealing with a “broad church” (to appropriate Claudia Mitchell’s description of Self-Study at a seminar at DUT in August, 2009), in which there was room for many styles of action research and self-study. We agreed that there was room for useful discussion and debate, and that this would be a rich and meaningful exercise. We also talked about the characteristics of ‘courage’ and ‘generosity’ and cited examples of this in the research and practice in our experience in these areas.

We agreed that many of the functions of SIGS as identified by HELTASA could and would be addressed digitally through regular communication via three listserves/jiscmails:

- Action Research Africa Network, [ARAN@JISCMAIL.AC.UK],
- Practitioner-Researcher [PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER2JISCMAIL.AC.UK];
- Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) Masters and Doctoral Studies [TRANSFORMATIVEEDUCATION-ALSTUDY@JISCMAIL.AC.ZA].

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It was noted that members of SIGs should be members of HELTASA. Attendance at the annual HELTASA conference includes annual membership and all such people are automatically HELTASA members for the calendar year following the conference. Those who do not attend the HELTASA conference should pay annual membership subscriptions. The details of this are available on the HELTASA website.

An email was sent to all who attended the meeting, and to 46 more people representing another 10 universities in a further two countries. These people had all either expressed regret that they could not attend the meeting, or had expressed an interest in the establishment of the ARaSS SIG.

### **Public Action Research and Self-Study events to date**

- Wednesday, November 30, 2011, 15.45–17.45, Room 510-0004, Missionvale Campus, NMMU: Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Joan Conolly conducted a workshop titled “Transformative Education/al Studies” with three participants from three different universities. With such a small number of participants it was possible to engage in a most worthwhile in-depth discussion about the challenges facing self-study practitioner-researchers, and the kinds of support that are available.
- Friday, December 2, 2011, 10.45–12.20, Room 503, Missionvale Campus, NMMU): Lesley Wood (NMMU), Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (UKZN), Mark Schofield (Edgehill, UK), Omar E sau (SU) and Joan Conolly (DUT) made brief comments about their perspectives and experience of action research and self-study to inform the topic “Improving teaching and learning in higher education through practitioner self-enquiry action research”. Eighteen attendees from nine higher education institutions participated in the discussion which followed. Questions asked provided an opportunity to address issues of rigour, relevance, authenticity, researcher agency, and social and educational impact.
- Sunday–Tuesday, March 4 –6, 2012, Room 202, Edgewood Campus, UKZN: “Transformative Education/al Studies” workshops were facilitated by Anastasia Samaras (George Mason University, Virginia, USA) and Mieke Lunenberg (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands) on aspects of self-study in teacher education, self-study for improvement of professional practice, and the role of self-study approaches as research methodologies. An average of 30 people from five higher education institutions attended the three-day workshop.

To receive communications about the ARaSS SIG, those interested are urged to join at least one of the three listserves/jiscmails: Action Research Africa Network, [ARAN@JISCMail.AC.UK], Practitioner-Researcher [PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER@JISCMail.AC.UK] and Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) Masters and Doctoral Studies [TRANSFORMATIVEEDUCATION-ALSTUDY@JISCMail.AC.ZA].

We look forward to hearing from anyone who would like to contribute to our online ARaSS conversations.

**Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)**

**Volume: 1 no. 1, April 2012**

**pp. 98-100**

**[ersc.nmmu.ac.za](http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za)**

**ISSN: 2221-4070**

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **A review of “Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world” for Educational Research for Social Change by O. Zuber-Skerritt**

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While the edited volume, *Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world* (Zuber-Skerritt, 2012), is not focused specifically on educational action research, its title alone is likely to strike a chord with many educators and educational researchers. The word “turbulent” is derived from the Latin “*turbulentus*”, meaning “full of commotion” (Oxford South African Concise English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn., 2010) and indeed, the process of education is “full of commotion”—experiential, emergent, changeable, and alive with uncertainties. The fluidity of human educational experience means that there is always space for development and improvement. Hence, educational action research is premised on a conviction that while producing new knowledge about education through research is important, it is not sufficient. The very *process* of the action research itself should be aimed at improving education and— according to *emancipatory* or *critical* action researchers—it should also be intended to contribute to social change (Zeichner, 1993; Robinson & Meerkotter, 2003; Zuber-Skerritt, 2012b). Significantly, as Zeichner (1993, p. 201) points out, this contribution does not have to be on a grand scale to be of value:

Individuals or small groups of practitioners such as teachers may not be able to change unjust societal structures through their classroom action research, but these teachers can and do make real and important differences in terms of affecting the life chances of their students.

It is interesting to see a critical action research orientation reflected in the 2012 theme of one of the most internationally influential educational research events—the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting. The theme of this year’s meeting is “*Non Satis Scire: To Know Is Not Enough*” and, in their call for submissions, Ball and Tyson argue that

when far too many children and adults in our global society have suffered—and continue to suffer—marginalization, neglect, and denigration, we must be vigilant in ensuring that our research is seen in the language of policy and legislation, as well as in the *actions* [emphasis added] of teachers, administrators, school boards, parent groups, community organizers, foundations, and government officials. (2011, p. 198)

From my perspective as a South African educator-researcher, this position certainly seems relevant in the South African context, where education (at schools and Higher Education Institutions) continues to be

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undermined by a combination of disturbing factors, including pervasive social and economic inequities, the HIV epidemic, and high levels of violence and discrimination (see, among others, Department of Education 2007; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010; Shabangu, 2011; South African Human Rights Commission 2006, 2008a, 2008b). In apartheid South Africa, emancipatory educational action research was seen “as a powerful tool of resistance” (Robinson, 2009, p. 122) by educators and researchers who had “a clear commitment to linking the political and the educational in a concerted effort to stimulate educational and social transformation’ (Robinson & Meerkotter 2003, p. 462). And, as this special edition of *ERSC* illustrates, action research continues to make a valuable contribution to educational research for social change in the democratic South Africa.

While the context for the action research that is presented and analysed in *Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world* is largely Australian, this volume is a potentially useful resource for action researchers globally. In particular, the strong focus on the theoretical foundations and contributions of action research will be of value in counteracting the common argument that this kind of research is not scholarly because it is ‘atheoretical’ and ‘not rigorous’. The practical exemplars given also provide an array of ‘hands-on’ approaches to action research.

To explore how accessible *Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world* might be to a novice educational researcher in the South African context, I asked Teboho Hlao, a Master of Education student, to review one of the practical exemplars. Hlao is currently working on his research proposal and is considering taking an action research approach to his study of team sport as a way of promoting inclusivity on a university campus. He provided the following response to the chapter by Sankaran and Brown, “Coaching collaborative creativity and innovation: An action-based method for sustainable innovation learning and development in business organization”:

As the topic of this chapter states, it is clear that Sankaran and Brown (2012) are looking at how to develop the use of two concepts—creativity and innovation—together for development in the business world. They show how design thinking and action research/ action learning could be used together to overcome the problems that the traditional approaches and problem solving strategies could not bridge in the development of the businesses. They use Brown (2008), Carlopio (2009), Dorst (2010), and Martin (2008) to emphasise the value of design thinking in comparison to the traditional approaches and strategies in business. However, they indicate that design thinking and action research/ action learning used separately have some limitations, so that is why they coach for collaborative use of the two. Their study reveals that group coaching methodology with the combined use of design thinking and action research/ action learning can help managers in business to solve existing and deliberate problems in their organisations. In my view, this approach can work in many organisations or even educational institutions because there is teamwork involved; all stakeholders are included in decision-making. This means that, whatever agreement comes up, every party in the organisation or institution is represented.

In summary, my suggestion is that this methodology should be tried in different worlds (continents) with different backgrounds to explore the value of this approach for educational research. However, it should be taken into consideration that this methodology can have some limitations. For example, it could be time consuming because there has to be an agreement between stakeholders, which might take a long time to achieve.

As Hlao has suggested, as an action research text, the ideas and strategies presented in *Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world* do need to be tried out in different worlds and for diverse research purposes. I anticipate that we will see further engagement with this volume in the research that is made public in future issues of *ERSC*.

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