

Jack Whitehead's Reflections following a workshop, on action research and living educational theory, and individual conversations at Durban University of Technology between the 8th-12th December 2009.

How Can We Enhance Our Contributions to Educational Knowledge with Self-Studies for Transformative Higher Education (SeStuTHE)?

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Professor Joan Conolly invited me to lead a self-study workshop at Durban University of Technology (DUT) on the 8th and 9th December 2009. Joan coordinates the work of the Self-Study for Transformative Higher Education (SeStuTHE) at DUT. I was delighted to accept the invitation and here are two points I made in the workshop about the significance of making public the embodied knowledge the participants brought into the living space. These points supported by video-clips are following by some further video clips and my reflections on making public and evolving embodied knowledge, from conversations with Shubnum Rambharos, Delysia Timm, Joan Conolly, B P Singh and A K Mohamed on the 10th and 13th December in DUT.

The first point is related to the original contributions to educational knowledge I claim that participants in the workshop could produce by making public the embodied knowledge they bring into the space shown in the two brief clips from the workshop.

The first clip begins at the end of a break in the workshop. I want to begin my analysis of the significance of making public the embodied knowledge in this space and place by focusing on the movements in the dynamic relationships between the participants. I am in the foreground talking with AK (in the white topi) and Shubnum and two other participants. I would like you to focus your attention on the movements of communication, rather than the sounds, in the foreground and from and between the individuals and groups to the left and right of the foreground.



4:18 min <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7BkeD7l0o0>

I know that what is said in the communications between the individuals is significant in developing a shared understanding of the communication. I know that as I write I am using my scribal literacy to communicate my meanings. With the video you can hear sounds of communication even though the meanings of the sounds are indistinct until I draw the group together to listen to my words.

However, even though my scribal literacy and aural abilities are important in my communications I want to stress the importance of recognizing the meanings in the communications of gestures for producing original contributions to educational knowledge. I am claiming that these gestures, and their visual representation through video, are vital for the communication of the meanings of the energy-flowing and values-laden constituents of the embodied knowledge of the individuals.

My first point is that the participants in the workshop could make their embodied knowledge public as they research to improve their practice and to enhance the knowledge-base of education. I am claiming that this could make an original contribution to educational knowledge through self-studies for transformative higher education, that make public the energy-flowing and values-laden explanatory principles that each individual uses to give meaning and purpose to their lives in education. These explanatory principles, once made public, form the living standards of judgment that individual's use to account/explain their educational influences in improving practice and in generating knowledge.

My second point is related to what can be seen on this 2:20 minutes video clip.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oFB1mLCAdY>

In the middle of the image above you can see a screen. It is showing the doctoral thesis of Cupane (of the Universidade Pedagógica de Moçambique) on 'Towards a culture-sensitive pedagogy of science teacher education in Mozambique'. I am stressing the importance for self-study researchers of including sufficient evidence in their analyses and explanations of practice, to justify their claims to knowledge.

My second point is that the screen can be understood as an electronic portal through which are flowing the gifts of self-study and other researchers. These researchers have used and developed their talents in improving their practice and in generating the knowledge that they have made public and offered freely as gifts to be used by others, like ourselves if we wish. You can access the gifts of self-study researchers at <http://www.actionresearch.net> with its newly established search engine. At the moment the video was taken the gifts are flowing into the space and place of Durban University of Technology. No self-study accounts are as yet flowing through the web from DUT as gifts of knowledge to be used by other researchers. The embodied knowledge in the space and place shown in the two video-clips is extensive with the profound depth of professional experience of the participants. It is my claim that making public this knowledge is contributing to making the world a better place to be.

Educational conversations with some of the participants in relation to making public and evolving their self-studies for transformative higher education. Joan Conolly and Delysia Timm

Joan and Delysia work and research together at Durban University of Technology and are influential members of the group who are engaged in self-studies for transformative higher education. Joan is supervising Delysia's enquiry and Delysia has worked as Joan's Head of Department.

In the two clips Delysia shares her perception of Joan's supervision.



6:44 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2uTcxZtYcw>

5:10 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvglisSULCI>

Joan's scholarship includes an extensive engagement with the ideas of Marcel Jousse. An engagement she shares with Edgard Sienaert in several translations of Jousse's writings and in her doctorate. Joan uses the ideas of Jousse to emphasise the importance of energy-flowing communications through gesture, orality and scribal literacy.

In relation to my two points above I believe that Joan and Delysia could produce and share the gift of making public their embodied knowledge as an original contribution to educational knowledge. I am thinking particularly of Joan and Delysia making public their embodied knowledge of the relational dynamics of their educational influences in each other's learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they are living and working. I think that their original contribution could be related to Jousse's insights about the importance of sustaining a connection between gestural, oral and scribal communications. Their contributions could include the meanings of their energy-flowing and values-laden spiritual commitments in their educational practices and claims to educational knowledge.

Shubnum Rambharos

Shubnum appears in the first clip above in the foreground and we have a brief word about organization matters before I begin after the break. I believe that Shubnum embodies an original contribution to educational knowledge that she could offer as a gift through the electronic portal of Durban University of Technology.

At 1:58 minutes into the clip below you can hear Shubnum explain that she has a university wide responsibility for supporting extended projects. At 1:58 minutes I feel an empathetic resonance with what I experience as Shubnum's expression of life-enhancing energy and values-laden practice. Shubnum is recognized within DUT as having a systemic influence in enhancing the students' educational experiences in their extended projects. My strong intuition is that

Shubnum could make public her embodied knowledge of how she expresses and develops this systemic influence.



3:18 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6_MozoGZ2s

A K Mohamed

AK believes in the educational power of stories. He has developed his own capacity for story telling. He encourages others to tell their stories. In the video-clip you can hear AK communicating through narrative.

I am raising with AK the possibility that he could produce a story through his research that could explain his educational influence in his own learning and in the learning of others. I believe that this could be one of AK's original contributions to educational knowledge. Each individual's living theory is an evidence-based explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. AK's narratives show an engagement with both personal and social influences in learning. I am hopeful that AK will develop his self-study research to show his evidence-based explanations of his educational influences with his students, colleagues and the organization.



7:35 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH5Tp8MyOg>

B P Singh

BP is talking on the 2:06 min. clip about empowerment through education. BP expresses his life-enhancing energy and values-laden passion for education, through his gestures and his oral communication. BP gave me a copy of a novel he has written that engages with land restitution and social justice issues in South Africa. This novel is communicated through BP highly developed scribal literacy. I am suggesting that BP could connect his energy-flowing and values-laden educational practices to his scribal literacy in the novel to make public his embodied knowledge as an educator. This could then be offered as a gift to other educators by placing it in the flow of the internet with other self-studies for transformative higher education,

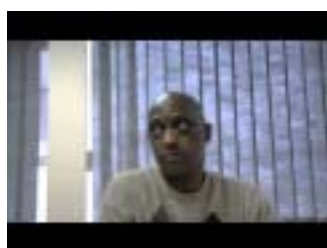


2:06 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-j5jHxyV3k>

Jerome Gumede

Jerome is researching 'The role of *Induku* in modern education: towards an understanding of personality among (Zulu) people with special reference to a study of *Induku* as an anthropological, social interactional and ceremonial performance from the cradle to the grave and beyond.'

As with all the clips the clips of Jerome show what everyone knows – nobody can do anything without the expression of energy. Yet, flows of energy are difficult to represent through scribal literacy. They can however been experienced most powerfully through gesture and in our oral communications. It isn't that our scribal communications cannot refer to energy. It is that the meanings of flows of energy that help to constitute the explanatory principles we use in explanations of influence can perhaps best be comprehending through ostensive expressions of meaning with visual data. I believe that Jerome could make an original contribution to knowledge by emphasising the importance of the expressions of flows of life-enhancing energy and embodied understandings from Zulu culture, in claims to knowledge from a South African context.



(7:49m) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhs_RwzdnOs (8:43m) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u|Ax0L3616U>

Researchers in the Department of Education at Durban University of Technology have identified cross-field outcomes as generic, underpinning learning outcomes that are to be integrated and assessed in every programme of study. Following each of the twelve outcome statements below I have given an indication of how these could be met in self-studies for transformative higher education.

1. **Identify and solve problems** in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made;

Educators, educational leaders and educational administrators in higher education are continuously working to enhance their educational influences in the learning of their students and colleagues. They exercise their creativity in imagining ways of enhancing this influence. They demonstrate their critical judgments in evaluating the effectiveness of their influence in their students' learning.

The primary responsible decision of a self-study researcher is the one identified by Polanyi in Personal Knowledge:

I must understand the world from my point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgement responsibly with universal intent (Polanyi, 1958, p. 327).

2. **Work effectively with others** as a member of a team, group, organisation, community;

The self-studies of researchers who are exploring the implications of asking, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' always take place in a social context that involves working with other individuals, a team, group, organization and/or community. Self-studies often take place within participative enquiries in which the self-study researcher is working with others to enhance the influence of a team, group, organization or community, in living more fully the values and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity and their own. The processes of validation used in self-studies enable the evaluations of the effectiveness of working with others to be integrated in the process of improving practice and generating knowledge.

3. **Organise and manage oneself** and one's activities responsibly and effectively;

The processes of self-study for transformative higher education include evaluations of the evidence-based accounts of how the individual organizes and manages themselves in expressing their responsibility and enhancing their effectiveness in the conduct of their enquiry. The validation group to which the self-study researcher submits their evidence-based account is explicitly asked to evaluate the validity of the researcher-account in terms of the exercise of their responsibility and in enhancing their effectiveness in improving practice and in generating knowledge.

4. **Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information;**

Self-Study researchers contribute to knowledge in their narratives of learning as they seek to enhance their educational influences in learning and engage with the constraints and opportunities in the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they live and work. They demonstrate the quality of their collection, analysis, organization and critical evaluation of information in their validated accounts of learning. Validation meetings with peers are asked to use Habermas' four criteria of social validity to help to strengthen the validity of the accounts. The criteria are:

Comprehensibility – does it make sense to the reader?

The truth of the propositional content – is there sufficient evidence to justify the claims being made?

A recognized normative background – Do the writings show that the writer is aware of the normative (cultural) background that is influencing the writing?

Authenticity - Does the evidence in the account show that the writer, over time and in interaction, is expressing his intentions. (Habermas, 1976, pp.2-3)

5. **Communicate effectively** using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion;

The self-study researchers at DUT are using visual, oral and scribal forms of communication. They already demonstrate effective communications through their scribal literacy. The area in which they are making original contributions is through the creative use of the ideas of Marcel Jousse. In particular video data is being used to communicate the meanings of ontological values as these are expressed and clarified in educational relationships. These values constitute the explanatory principles used by the self-study researchers to explain their educational influences in learning. They flow with ‘life-enhancing energy’ and are intimately related to the expression of passion and emotion. As the values are made public as explanatory principles they form the living standards of judgment that the individual uses to evaluate the validity of their claims to knowledge.

6. **Use science and technology effectively and critically**, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others;

The action reflection cycles of expressing concerns, imagining solutions, developing an action plan and acting, gather data for evaluating effectiveness, evaluating effectiveness in terms of values and understandings, modifying concerns, plans and actions in the light of the evaluations are systematic forms of scientific enquiry and conform to technological design processes. The critical judgments of the researcher are expressed and evolved in the processes of evaluation where the effectiveness of the actions and validity of the knowledge-claims are assessed. The self-study enquiries of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ are asked within complex ecologies that influence the enquiry, as do the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the enquiry. The health of others is embraced in the desire and practice to enhance well-being in one’s own learning and in the learning of others.

7. Demonstrate an understanding of the **world as a set of related systems** by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation;

The self-study researcher locates enquiries of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ within the ecological and sociocultural contexts that influence the enquiry. The draw on the most advanced social theories of the day and explain how these influence the direction of practice and the claims to knowledge.

8. Reflect on and explore **a variety of strategies** to learn more effectively;

As the self-study researcher responds to the tension of feeling that practice could be improved the imagination comes into play in imagining a variety of strategies that could help to improve practice and learning. The process of evaluation highlights the importance of reflection in assessing the effectiveness of the chosen strategy.

9. **Participate as responsible citizens** in the life of the local, national and global communities;

As responsible citizens, self-study researchers address issues of enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity and their own. Their questions, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ are always contextualized within a local practice. Their national and global significance are understood in relation to national and global policies for enhancing citizenship in national and global contexts. One way in which self-study researchers participate, as responsible citizens, is by sharing their knowledge-creation and learning in national research forums and globally through the electronic communications on the internet. There are some resources on the web, from Whitehead’s (2009) keynote address at a conference at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, that could help to communicate this sharing of knowledge-creation and learning.

10. **Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive** across a range of social contexts;

The cultural sensitivity of the self-study researcher is expressed and developed in the validation groups where the researcher’s accounts are assessed in relation to their cultural awareness in making explicit the normative assumptions that influence the analysis.

The aesthetic sensitivity is expressed and developed in responses to others that show empathetic resonance with the energy-flowing values of others. The self-study researcher shows this aesthetic sensitivity in their receptive responsiveness to the stories of others in which they are expressing the values they use to give meaning and purpose to their lives.

11. **Explore education and career opportunities;**

Self-study researchers in higher education are exploring their own higher education as they ask, research and answer questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ Their research takes place in the workplace and can be seen in terms of career opportunities to enhance the significance of their lives through their productive work.

12. **Develop entrepreneurial opportunities.**

The entrepreneurial spirit of self-study researchers is expressed in their contributions to the innovative practices of identifying and/or creating opportunities and then acting to manifest those opportunities in a productive way. Specific expressions of the development of these opportunities can be seen in the use of digital technologies to bring about an epistemological transformation in educational knowledge. This can be seen in the willingness of educators in DUT to engage in self-studies of their own practices as they seek to

enhance their educational influences in learning and to generate knowledge. Through their multi-media accounts of their educational influences they are showing how the expression of their energy-flowing and values-laden explanatory principles is making an original contribution to educational knowledge.

References

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