

How am I using my Christian intellect in developing my living educational theory to facilitate transformational learning in my philosophy students? Methodological Perspectives.

Presented during Research Week November 2011
Strathmore University

Catherine Dean – Adjunct Lecturer
cdean@strathmore.edu
School of Humanities and Social Studies
Strathmore University

Introduction

In this paper I will present a brief overview of the research I am carrying out for my doctorate. I will focus more specifically on the methodology which I am using, known as Living Theory. I hope to situate it within the context of research methodology in general, explain it and offer a critical analysis to illustrate why I have chosen this methodology over other possibilities. I look forward to receiving feedback from members of the Strathmore academic community from different fields, to help me further explain and clarify the methodological dimension of my doctoral research.

The beginnings of my research journey

When embarking on a research adventure, the focus is often on the research question, objectives, and methodology. However, these pieces of the research puzzle (jigsaw) require a background structure which provides cohesion, harmony and guidance in developing the various aspects of the jigsaw. I am referring to what some authors call the *philosophical underpinnings* of the research which may be categorized in various ways but which often include ontology, epistemology, and axiology, along with the research design and methods or strategy (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; Creswell, 2007). Saunders et al state that “your choice of philosophical approach is a reflection of your values, as is your choice of data collection techniques” (2009). I found this very interesting as, when I started thinking about my doctoral research, I wanted to work on something that genuinely interested me, and use an approach with which I could personally identify. At the same time, I did not want to do my doctorate in the areas of pure Theology or Philosophy, which were the fields of

study I had been working in for a number of years, as I felt the need to carry out research that would have a more directly practical impact. This thought process led me to the area of educational research, particularly given that I had already been teaching in higher education for over ten years. As I am currently teaching Philosophy, and I am concerned about the effectiveness of my teaching practice in terms of its impact on the students, it became clear to me that I should carry out my research on teaching philosophy in a manner that facilitates personal transformation in my students.

The question regarding the methodology I should use was challenging as my philosophical and theological training did not provide an appropriate research methodology for the question that interested me. At the same time, the quantitative and qualitative research methods in the social sciences and educational research, did not appeal to me as I found them somewhat rigid and inflexible, and to a certain extent, removed from the complex reality of everyday teaching practice.

At this point, through my supervisor, I came into contact with action research living theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) which I initially found difficult to understand due to its apparent subjectivity and the various layers of reflection which it employs. However, as I studied more about this approach, I realized that the degree of flexibility and creativity which it offers would suit my research concern, and allow for the use of my own value system, along with the philosophical perspective which I have developed over time. So I decided to take the risk and launch out to use a relatively new approach to research, which I am now finding very satisfying, particularly because it combines theory and practice in an innovative and creative manner. Today I would like to take the opportunity to present my research methodology and test my capacity to explain and account for it, to receive feedback and assistance in identifying elements that may need to be further clarified.

Approaches to research

Before choosing a research methodology, we need to understand its underlying philosophy, which is often summarized in the following points (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009):

Assumption	Description
Ontology	Assumptions about the nature of reality / how the world operates e.g. objectivism; subjectivism
Epistemology	What constitutes acceptable knowledge within a field of inquiry e.g. observable phenomena (positivism); human behavior and differences (interpretivism)

Axiology	The values which guide us in making judgements about our research e.g. honesty
Research paradigm	Worldview / way of studying social phenomena e.g. pragmatism; social constructivism; to bring about change
Interpretative framework	Theories taken from the social sciences to provide a theoretical basis for the research analysis e.g. critical pedagogy; feminist theories; postmodernism
Approaches to inquiry / research strategy	Deductive or inductive approach => research methods used to gather data e.g. to build a meaningful theory => qualitative methods such as ethnography, case studies, etc.

Ideally, these six areas should be logically aligned, so that there is consistency throughout the research model, from the level of ontology (your assumptions about the nature of reality) to the practical level of data collection (what kind of data you collect and how you collect it) and analysis. This summary falls within fairly traditional approaches to research in the social sciences, based largely on the idea that research is a theoretical, academic activity, which simultaneously involves data collection and analysis to provide sufficient evidence, or proof of the validity of one's research findings.

However, in a broader perspective, such as that offered by the humanities and other disciplines, there are other ways of carrying out valid research and identifying legitimate findings. For example, in some fields, research starts from first principles which are universally acknowledged and accepted by all, as received by the given discipline; from there, the research process may involve critical analysis and logical thinking to come up with new ideas and principles, which can be verified by their logical connection with the initial first principles. Philosophical research often functions in this manner, as Young (2010) explains: "Philosophy arises from the self-evident truths and immediately experienced facts that common sense apprehends. However, it does not accept them because common sense affirms them, but because their truth is evident. And it reflects upon them clearly to vindicate them. Philosophy is more than a mature common sense. It is knowledge of all things through their highest causes, proceeding under the light of reason. It is concerned with what things are (their formal and material causes), what makes them be (their efficient causes), and why they be (their final causes). The true philosopher sees the intelligible principles that explain things: all his thinking is done under the light of these principles" (2010). The author brings out the fact that philosophical thinking starts from the real world, "its evidential basis"; the observance or perception of self-evident principles and directly experienced data. From there it moves on to reflect on these principles and data, to penetrate into the principles and the reasoning or logic behind the evidence, in order to discover its truth and meaning. In a

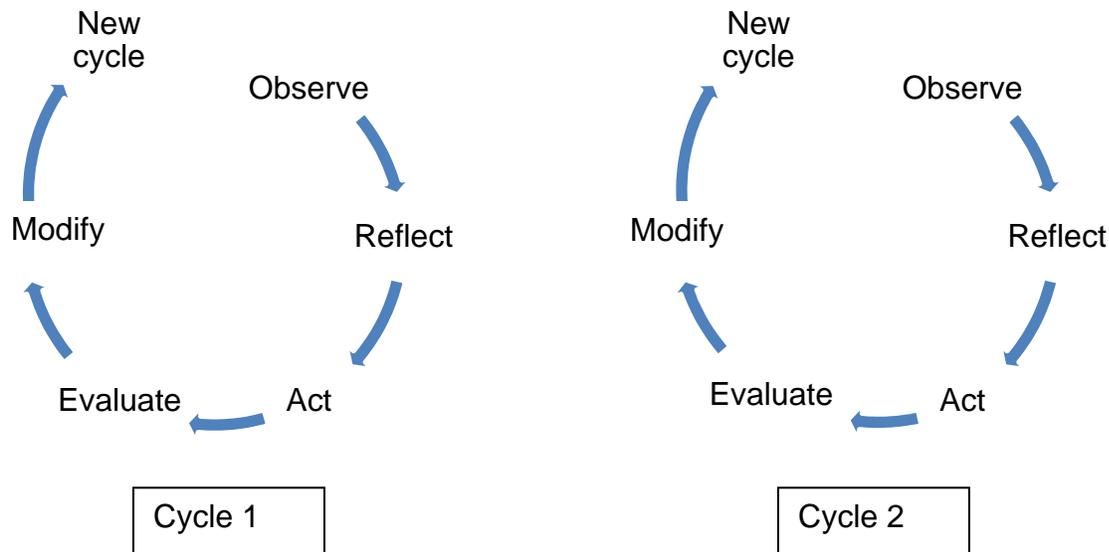
sense, true philosophy is a high level intellectual development of common sense. “Since its truths are radically contained in common sense, we should ascend from the common sense knowledge we possess to the philosophical knowledge we seek” (Young, 2010).

Another approach to research which has developed in the last forty years is practice based research, often known as practitioner research. It has grown, at least partially, from the seeds planted by Schön in his work on reflective practice (1983), which led him to call for a *new epistemology*, or a new way of acquiring acceptable knowledge, based on reflection on professional practice, giving rise to new ways of understanding that practice and how it may be carried out in an effective manner (1995). Schön was concerned about the fact that, within the research community in general, the work of academics who produce “pure” conceptual theory is usually regarded as the only form of legitimate, new knowledge in any given field. He claims that the work of those practitioners “on the ground”, people in their work places, often produces new forms of practical knowledge, which, although it may be recognized as useful knowledge by the professional researchers in academia, is not considered to constitute real conceptual theory. Yet, Schön claimed, often the knowledge produced in the “swampy lowlands” (1983) of professional work, is often of more benefit to ordinary people, while the knowledge produced on the “high ground” (1983) of academia is frequently far removed from the real needs of everyday life and so becomes somewhat meaningless, irrelevant and remote. Schön encouraged professional practitioners to investigate their practice, develop their own theories of knowledge within their fields, test and critique their theories to demonstrate their validity and so have these ideas accepted as genuine contributions to theory within academic research. The development of practitioner research has contributed to greater value being attributed within the traditional research community, to learning, knowledge and theory which has been created within the workplace and is often referred to as theory of practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). In global terms, one of the trends within research is precisely the effort to link theory with practice and to theorise practice, to produce more relevant and useful new knowledge which may be more beneficial to society, industry, etc. Through practitioner research “Practitioners can show how they have contributed to new practices, and how these practices can transform into new theory” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009).

Practitioner research often makes use of action research as a methodology to facilitate investigation into professional practice. Action research has its roots in the work of Lewin (1946), who believed that people would be more motivated at work if they were more involved in decision-making about how the workplace was run. He carried out research into what happened when people did become more involved and was able to show the benefits of this practice. He is best known for the action-reflection cycle which he designed to facilitate his research: observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify – new

cycle – observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify – etc. This original idea has been adopted and adapted by many researchers to organize their work and reports.

The following is a modified example of Schön’s action-reflection cycles:



In the 1950s and 1960s, action research was adopted within the teaching profession and was popularized in the USA by Stephen Corey’s (1953) book *Action Research to Improve School Practice*. Although its influence and use declined later in the USA, it was taken up in Britain through the work of Lawrence Stenhouse who used it in the context of teacher education (1975). His work was developed by action researchers connected with the Centre for Applied Research in Education. Over time, the ideas which emanated from this Centre were further developed by others in different contexts, such as Stephen Kemmis in Australia (participatory action research), John Elliott at the University of East Anglia (interpretative approaches to action research) and Jack Whitehead at the University of Bath (self-study approach to action research). These diverse approaches have implications in terms of how professional education is understood and conducted as well as in terms of how action research itself is understood. However, in general terms, action research has become known as a form of practical research that legitimizes teachers’ attempts to understand their work from their own perspective; instead of applying theories to themselves, they are encouraged to explore their practice and identify ways of improving it. In this way, their practical wisdom has gained status and is recognized as a theory of practice. Action research is

now used across many professions as a form of professional learning and contribution to knowledge creation (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009).

The beauty of practitioner research

As I mentioned earlier, I wanted to investigate how I could teach philosophy more effectively, using a flexible research methodology which would allow for my own philosophical perspectives and values. In 2001, Dadds and Hart already wrote in defense of innovative and creative research strategies as follows: “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. Practitioner research methodologies are with us to serve professional practices. So what genuinely matters are the purposes of practice which the research seeks to serve, and the integrity with which the practitioner researcher makes methodological choices about ways of achieving those purposes. No methodology is, or should be, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods or techniques” (Dadds & Hart, 2001)¹.

This text captures certain important elements which I personally have found to be a breath of fresh air when facing my research, as well as indicating relevant factors which should be looked at or considered in the use of any research methodology. I would identify these elements as follows:

1. The practical dimension of research, which extends far beyond the purely academic understanding of research as carried out in the traditional university setting under the threat of “publish or perish”.
2. Practitioner research is carried out by professional people who are genuinely interested in improving the quality and outcomes of their work.
3. The emphasis on service to others in practitioner research, as it is carried out for the sake of those people who are at the receiving end of our professional practice.
4. The awareness of the need for integrity in one’s research.
5. These “values”, which tend to characterise practitioner research, require methodological flexibility so that new and different research processes can be designed by the researcher as needed, in order to serve the overall aim of improving professional practice for the benefit of other people.

¹ The emphasis is mine.

6. Practitioner research, ideally, reaches far beyond pre-set ideas regarding research processes, techniques, procedures, methods, etc., and as such, is in a position to create, develop and contribute highly relevant and important new knowledge with the intrinsic aim of improving the overall well-being of humanity.

I can personally identify with these ideals as life experience has taught me the importance of linking theory with practice, in order to be more effective in helping my students to learn in a transformative manner and to find personal fulfilment in the effort to “practice what I preach”. I also aim at serving those I teach, and fostering my own personal integrity in all I do. As a result, practitioner research in general is a form of research which I find particularly attractive and stimulating. At the same time, as expressed forcefully by Dadds & Hart, this type of research allows for great flexibility and inventiveness, another feature with which I personally identify, because as time passes and I grow professionally, I find that I need more and more openness and room for “movement” and creativity in my work, precisely so that I can be more effective. Finally, practitioner research requires personal reflection on my own teaching practice, to evaluate it, find ways of improving it and eventually, develop my own understanding of what I am doing in class, and how these efforts are changing me and my students. My growing understanding implies the development of my knowledge about my work, and the creation of new, personal knowledge which can contribute to the general body of knowledge regarding teaching practice, to the extent that I make my knowledge explicit and public. The novelty of my research may also lie in the approaches to my enquiry which I develop as instruments in facilitating the development of new, valid understandings and knowledge².

Action Research Living Theory

Within the broad range of possibilities offered by practitioner research, I have found that action research living theory as developed by Jack Whitehead seems to meet my personal needs and interests at all levels. This approach to research has evolved and is still evolving over time, having had its starting point in Whitehead’s efforts to improve his professional educational practice by asking, researching and answering questions of the kind *How do I improve what I am doing?* (Whitehead, 1989).

Whitehead & McNiff (2006) offer clear definitions and explanations about how to do action research in a way which facilitates the development of a living theory of education through the identification of living standards of judgement (personal educational values), criteria for action to implement these standards and systems for evaluating the outcome of the implementation of these criteria. At the same time,

² Dadds & Hart (2001) contains many examples of very creative, yet systematic, practitioner research which has produced valid and important findings in education and other fields.

Whitehead himself makes a clear distinction between living educational theories, and a living theory methodology.

“A living (educational) 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” (Whitehead, 2008).

“A methodology is not only a collection of the methods used in the research. It is distinguished by a philosophical understanding of the principles that organise the ‘how’ of the enquiry. A living theory methodology explains how the enquiry was carried out in the generation of a living theory” (Whitehead, 2008).

Whitehead’s understanding of methodology may be contrasted with that of Crotty (1998) and also Creswell (2003), for whom the term methodology refers to the strategies of enquiry which will inform the methods or procedures used in the research. The living theory definition of methodology is deeper and more meaningful than other perspectives because it expresses the search for an understanding of how the enquiry was carried out at a foundational level, that is, at the level of explanatory principles³.

For Whitehead, the living theory methodology which one creates or designs, is the basis for the development of one’s living theory of education. The following is my personal summary of his living theory in general terms, accompanied by my analysis of the various points:

³ For a useful summary and critique of practitioner research and action research living theory, see A. Serper (2010). *An Analytical Critique, Deconstruction, And Dialectical Transformation And Development Of The Living Educational Theory Approach*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Bath.

No.	Whitehead	My analysis
1.	The espousal of “methodological inventiveness”.	Corresponds to my need for flexibility and creativity in my intellectual work.
2.	Use of action reflection cycles as a method (rather than a methodology).	I am naturally inclined to reflect on my work; I have actually been using these cycles unawares for some time.
3.	<p>The importance of social and personal validation by one’s peers as a method for examining “data as evidence”, in the quest for comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity in one’s research.</p> <p>Both forms of verification reflect the commonly accepted important features of good research work such as intellectual grasp, coherence, engagement with literature, good presentation, clear methodology, generalisability, originality and publishability (Winter, Griffiths, & Green, 2000).</p>	<p>I aim to show that the effort to be a truthful person and to seek the truth in one’s research leads to personal veracity which can be authenticated by others; their testimonies become a valid way of verifying my claims to new knowledge. The use of philosophical and theological methodologies can also contribute to verifying our claims to new and true knowledge.</p>
4.	The inclusion of life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles for one’s educational influences	I am greatly attracted by the possibility of using the values and ideals which motivate and give meaning to my life and work to explain how I influence the development of my own knowledge and that of my students.
5.	The inclusional dimension of research; the importance of highlighting relationally-dynamic awareness in our interaction with others and the levels of receptive	My sensitivity to other people and their needs has grown and developed over time, very especially thanks to my teaching experience in Kenya. I am

	response to the flows of energy and values within the space and boundaries where we work.	interested in studying the development of my “relationally-dynamic awareness” and drawing out the implications it has for my work, as well as understanding the problems incurred when the “receptive response” by students appears to be lacking.
6.	The impact on learning of these relational dynamics, which is the educational influences that they produce.	I have discovered that how I treat my students, has a great influence on how they treat me, how they treat each other and the effectiveness or otherwise of their learning. The transformative capacity of living theory (Wood, 2009) depends greatly on these relational dynamics.
7.	Use of multimedia to illustrate and explain the dynamics of our educational influences in learning.	This is a new field to me, however, Jack Whitehead has brought to my attention the importance of bringing in data which illustrates visually the nature of my relationships with my students, colleagues and other people I interact with in the workplace, as my unique contribution to educational knowledge may be seen in these video clips.
8.	Use of narrative enquiry, including “narrative wreckage” (Whitehead, 2008), that is, moments of failure, rejection, difficulty, etc., in our professional practice, and the learning which took place through those experiences.	Narrative allows me to develop my ideas and understanding, in the process of narrating important learning moments in my personal, intellectual and professional life. I also appreciate the importance of learning from apparent failure, weakness or limitations, so these experiences will also enrich the understanding of my practice.

		Experiencing oneself as a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989).
9.	Use of socio-cultural and socio-economic theories to analyse and explain the data included in the narrative.	I aim to use socio-cultural and economic facts (rather than theories), based on my observations and readings to explain the meaning of the work I carry out with my students.
10.	Use of other theoretical perspectives to generate one’s own living educational theory.	I have studied various disciples during my life, which have made me who I am and given me the capacity to analyse and understand life and experience. These perspectives will contribute to the development of my living educational theory and to my living theory methodology.

I should mention that action research living theory initially took time to be accepted within academic circles as a valid approach to research, particularly in the 1980s. However, it has now become widely accepted and many Master’s and Doctoral degrees have been awarded to candidates using this research approach, by universities around the world. The fields of research and the diverse use made of action research living theory may be seen in the titles of these dissertations, many of which have been made available on Jack Whitehead’s website: <http://www.actionresearch.net>⁴.

I may add that within action research living theory, diversity of views and debate about the methodology is beginning to emerge, particularly with the doctoral degree awarded to Alon Serper by the University of Bath in 2010 for his dissertation *An Analytical Critique, Deconstruction, And Dialectical Transformation And Development Of The Living Educational Theory Approach*. However, I will not go into his tenets and the surrounding debate here.

⁴ Examples of some titles: *Young children’s active citizenship: storytelling, stories, and social actions* by Louise Gwenneth Phillips, Queensland University of Technology (2010); *How do I come to understand my shared living educational standards of judgement in the life I lead with others? Creating the space for intergenerational student-led research* by Karen Susan Riding, University of Bath (October 2008); *How can I bring Ubuntu as a living standard of judgement into the academy? Moving beyond decolonization through societal reidentification and guiltless recognition*. Eden Charles, University of Bath (2007).

Why did I choose action research living theory?

To answer this question, I think it may be useful to present a comparative analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of traditional research assumptions and those employed in action research living theory (ARLT), along with a few personal comments. After that, I will be in a position to indicate why and how I am using ARLT.

Comparative analysis of philosophical assumptions in traditional research and ARLT			
Assumptions	Traditional	ARLT	My comments
Ontology	Assumptions about the <u>nature of reality</u> / how the world operates e.g. objectivism; subjectivism	<u>The study of being.</u> Value laden. Morally committed. Understand what I/we are doing, not only “they”. Researcher relates to everything in the research field and influences and is influenced by others.	Real world vs. Personal being situated in a real world context in conjunction with others The ARLT approach seems more holistic to me.
Epistemology	What constitutes <u>acceptable knowledge within a field of inquiry</u> e.g. observable phenomena (positivism); human behavior and differences (interpretivism)	<u>How we understand and acquire knowledge.</u> The object of the enquiry is the “I”. Knowledge is uncertain. Knowledge creation is a collaborative process.	Acceptable knowledge vs. Knowledge as acquired by the individual person in collaboration with others, which is versatile and changing The ARLT approach seems more flexible and realistic.
Axiology	The <u>values which guide us in making judgements about our research</u> e.g.		Values as (extrinsic?) guidelines for

	honesty		<p>making judgements about research</p> <p>vs.</p> <p>Values as intrinsic to the research because they belong to the person doing the research</p> <p>Values are incorporated at the ontological level in ARLT</p> <p>The ARLT approach appeals to me as I do strive to live the values that motivate me in all I do</p>
Research paradigm	<p><u>Worldview / way of studying social phenomena</u> e.g. pragmatism; social constructivism; to bring about change</p>		<p>ARLT claims to hold <u>no particular worldview</u>; it depends on the initiative of the individual researcher</p> <p>This allows me freedom to choose my worldview in my research</p>
Interpretative framework	<p><u>Theories taken from the social sciences to provide a theoretical basis for the research analysis</u> e.g. critical pedagogy; feminist theories; postmodernism</p>		<p>ARLT follows <u>no particular interpretative framework</u>; this will vary based on the knowledge and expertise of the</p>

			<p>researcher</p> <p>This liberates me from having to follow a theory invented by someone else in my research, which perhaps does not really convince me</p>
<p>Approaches to inquiry / research strategy</p>	<p><u>Deductive or inductive</u> approach => research methods used to gather data e.g. to build a meaningful theory => qualitative methods such as ethnography, case studies, etc.</p>	<p><u>Methodological assumptions:</u></p> <p>Do <u>research on oneself in the company of others.</u></p> <p>Start with a concern; use a developmental process of action-reflection cycles; demonstrate relationships of influence.</p> <p>Research one's practice to improve it with on-going new beginnings / change.</p>	<p>Researcher is more or less an independent observer</p> <p>vs.</p> <p>Researcher carries out <u>self-enquiry</u>; recognises <u>relational dynamics</u> in practice which should be taken into account in one's research; seeks <u>peer validation</u> with regard to one's research findings.</p> <p>ARLT allows me to investigate ways of improving my teaching practice, with the help of others, and develop my own theory of education; it recognizes the academic and</p>

			knowledge value of my teaching experience and reflection on practice over the years
Others		<u>Social assumptions:</u> Improve workplace practice through improving learning. Promote democratic evaluation of learning and practices. <u>Create good social orders by influencing the education of social formations.</u> Researchers/practitioners need to hold themselves accountable for their educational influences on society.	ARLT highlights the <u>social impact and responsibility of the researcher in their practice.</u> ARLT resonates with my desires to help make the world a better place through my professional work.

As discussed above, my interest in action research living theory as the key to my research strategy is largely based on its philosophical foundations, the role of personal values and the flexibility it offers. The points which I have highlighted in the table above further illustrate my interest in this research approach. I will now explain how I am working towards developing my own living theory methodology.

Towards my living theory methodology

There is plenty of debate around how action research aims to combine theory and practice in an effective manner (Dick, Stringer, & Huxham, 2009; Friedman, & Rogers, 2009; Gustavsen, 2008), which from the perspective of the human person, is understandable because as persons we are one harmonious being made of body and soul. We can think and we can act, and yet our thinking is only possible because we have previously had some experience which, through our external and internal senses, transmits information to the intellect, which can be abstracted, conceptualized, rationalized, and reflected upon.

At the same time, within action research there are many different views on how to go about uniting theory and practice in research (Dick, 2004; 2006; 2009; 2010); some claim that the issue regarding how theory is elicited from practice in action research has still not been fully understood or addressed (Dick, Stringer, & Huxham, 2009). However, the more I reflect on the term “living theory”, as used by Jack Whitehead within the context of action research, the more I discover the novelty of his approach. In many action research projects there is a lot of emphasis on the theory being used, the pre-established set of principles to guide and explain one’s action. Although there may be a concern to draw theory from the action-reflection cycles, this is often not the main focus, which tends to be centered on “improving practice”, a key area in action research.

In action research living theory, we do not aim at taking a particular theory and applying it in action. Rather, the emphasis is on developing one’s own personal theory of education. This theory is not based on an abstract, purely intellectual construction of ideas; one develops it over time as they reflect on their real life experience while implementing action reflection cycles and other systems to improve their professional practice. This opens up new avenues for understanding and explaining how theory may be drawn from practice in action research; a constant interplay between action and an ever deeper understanding of the meanings of the experience which that action gave rise to, through reflective self-questioning e.g. why did I choose this action and not another? What motivated me in my action? What is the source of that motivation? Over time, it becomes clear that what matters are the values which motivate one to improve their practice (action), which they try to come to know and understand better in the very effort to live those values in real life. One’s motivating values and how one strives to live them, become a key element in understanding one’s practice better. Understanding one’s motivating values in the context of one’s practice may then lead to formulating ideas and principles which help to explain and guide one’s action (theory). Yet this theory is not abstract and intellectual, it is living because one is striving to implement it in their practice each day. At the same time, one’s theory evolves continuously as, through on-going reflection on one’s practice, changing circumstances and new challenges, one has to adjust the way they live their motivating values. This in turn gives rise to a new and deeper understanding of one’s values and how to live them coherently in each context. And so reflection on this values-based practice helps one to develop their own theory of education, which we can genuinely refer to as a “living” theory, because it is as an explanation of the values one really lives in their practice and which constantly evolves over time.

Here we have an interesting link between how we act, the values which motivate us in real life, and our intellectual understanding of these processes and their meaning, acquired through reflection. As well as being a “personally relevant theory from

personally relevant experience” (Dick, 2006), genuine living theory demands personal integrity and authenticity. It implies fostering true harmony between how we act and how we think, or how we think and how we act. The effort to live according to our values and how we understand them contributes to developing a greater degree of personal inner unity between mind, heart, and body, which helps us to grow as persons. We are ever more aware of who we really are, how we really act, and are capable of making the necessary changes in ourselves to achieve that unity between action and thought which is an essential element of living theory. In this way we move towards personal unity of life, which in turn becomes a solid base from which we can reach out to others and contribute to the well-being of everyone with whom we interact and the society we live in.

“Living theory” is an approach to action research which genuinely helps this method to achieve its goal of uniting theory and practice, not just in an anonymous manner, but in a truly personal way which contributes to the well-being of the person who carries out this type of research, as well as that of those who experience his / her professional practice. Living theory appeals to me because I have always tried to live according to my values and I have a naturally reflective personal tendency. However, as I launch out to develop my own living educational theory, I also need to develop a living theory methodology, which is still at its initial stages, but which I outline as follows.

My living theory methodology is highly open-ended, as it uses autobiographical narrative, not as a methodology in itself but as a format for telling my story in its context; it incorporates reflection at different levels, on my personal life experiences and their influence in my own learning and in the learning of others, along with explanations of my efforts to improve my teaching practice, the feedback from my students, and references to testimonies from people who can verify much of what I claim in the narrative, such as family members, friends and colleagues. These are the people whom I will draw upon to help me tell my story and verify it where necessary. With the aid of my reflective autobiographical narrative I hope to clarify and explain my living educational theory and in this, express my contribution to knowledge in the field of educational research.

There is plenty of literature on the use of narrative inquiry in different forms and contexts for research purposes, however none of the models proposed respond to the way I would like to use narrative in my research (Clandinin et al. 2006; Clandinin et al. 2007; Hussein, 2008), as they tend to become somewhat inflexible when presented as methodologies in themselves. I have found practically nothing on the reflective process as a method of self-enquiry regarding one’s past or present, although there are works on the reflection carried out by the practitioner in professional practice (Schön, 1983; Schön, 1987; Jasper, 2005; Kinsella, 2007; Ramsey, 2005), as well as texts and articles

on narrative ways of reflecting on practice (Crawford, Dickinson, & Leitmann, 2002; Karpiak, 2003). Generally, narrative enquiry seems to be employed in a variety of ways and for different purposes, as a tool or method within other methodologies such as Action Research, Ethnography, etc. I will use reflective narrative to facilitate my self-enquiry.

Regarding the methods I use for collecting data in my research, my narrative itself will provide data which can be authenticated by others who have known me at different stages in life, based on the importance I give to positive interpersonal relationships.

Action reflection cycles, used unawares and consciously will be evident in the narrative, illustrating my search for personal growth in myself and others.

Feedback questionnaires given to my students at the end of a unit to freely answer or not, in accordance with my respect for personal freedom; some questionnaires helped students assess their personal growth, in different ways through my teaching.

Open-ended interviews with students and colleagues; some students have freely expressed their willingness to collaborate in my research by participating in these interviews, thanks to our good interpersonal relationships.

Video material of students implementing a social project in one of the Nairobi slums on their own initiative as a result of attending my classes.

Video clips of students who voluntarily agreed to participate in a presentation I gave at an Ethics conference held at Strathmore in 2010.

Video clips to illustrate my efforts to improve the classroom environment by fostering an open, receptive attitude and to show the reactions of my students to my efforts (interpersonal love).

Video clips of myself relating to other people at the University.

The data already collected in various forms seems to reflect the values which have become important for me and show how such values are influencing my teaching practice.

The methodological approach I am proposing involves the narration of experiences, for which I have evidence, enriched by reflection on these experiences, which brings out their truth and meaning at different levels, moving from the truth of self-evident facts, to

the truth of intellectual reflection on and understanding of these facts, to the philosophical truth of those facts, and finally to theological reflection on these facts, which can open up to us their deepest meaning.

At the root of this approach we find three assumptions:

1. The unity of Truth, that is, the fact that the Fullness of Truth by nature can only be One, although, we usually find it expressed in partial and participated forms in the created world. Even a small piece of new knowledge can be true as long as it can be shown to be a sharing in the Fullness of the One Truth, which will be expressed in the logical and intellectual harmony that exists between the two.
2. The harmony which actually exists between faith and reason. "Faith" here refers to truth which we know through God's revelation and our personal acceptance of this revelation through the gift of supernatural faith. We know these truths using our human intellect enlightened by faith, and they "take root" there, so to speak. "Reason" in this context expresses truth which we can access and know through exercising our intellectual capacity to know the truth, without the gift of faith. These truths are also rooted in our one and only human intellect. The harmony we are referring to, expresses the fact that the truths which can be attained by human reason alone are naturally in harmony with the truths which we attain and know thanks to the gift of faith. This is because the Truth is One. True knowledge can be acquired in two different ways, through supernatural faith or through the natural intellect alone; but as long as both "pieces" of knowledge are true, they share in the Fullness of the Truth and so, are also in harmony with one another.
3. As a result of understanding the previous assumptions, it is possible for the person to develop what is known as a Christian intellect; that is, a way of thinking and reflecting in which the union of human and supernatural reflection determines how we understand reality in its various aspects and allows us to achieve an ever deeper penetration into the meaning of life, experience and practice. Such an approach to reflection and research may only be effectively developed within the context of a genuine search for unity of life in the person . This concept implies the effort to always live according to the values one believes in, being able to explain what one believes and why one lives it out in practice as they do.

It seems that the novelty of my living theory methodology lies in how I use my Christian intellect, in conjunction with my personal search for unity of life as I strive to live and work according to the values which motivate my teaching practice, to explain,

understand and unearth the deeper meaning of the data which I collect regarding the effectiveness of my teaching practice in facilitating personal transformation in myself and my students.

As I reflect on this process, little by little I am discovering the philosophical underpinnings of my research, which, while inspired by action research living theory, also go beyond it. My understanding of my teaching practice and of the research processes I use will continue to evolve as I proceed with my doctoral work. In fact, this flexibility and on-going development of one's understanding of their work is one of the key features of action research living theory. However, at this point I can summarise my research approach in comparison with ARLT as follows:

Assumptions	ARLT	My research approach
Ontology	<p>The study of being.</p> <p>Value laden.</p> <p>Morally committed.</p> <p>Understand what I/we are doing, not only "they".</p> <p>Researcher relates to everything in the research field and influences and is influenced by others.</p>	<p>Combine classical philosophical approach which considers the real world from the metaphysical perspective (<i>esse</i> = act of being), with contemporary personalist philosophy which highlights the importance of each individual person and their life experience.</p> <p>Unity of my personal being in which "I" strive for harmonious co-existence of body, soul and affectivity. I unite in my personal being all that forms part of who I am and what I do. Unifying factor: act of being = love.</p> <p>"I" do not exist alone; search for loving co-existence and harmony with others, while accepting their uniqueness by respecting their freedom.</p>
Epistemology	<p>How we understand and acquire knowledge.</p> <p>The object of the enquiry is the "I".</p> <p>Knowledge is uncertain.</p> <p>Knowledge creation is a collaborative process.</p>	<p>Intellectual openness to and acceptance of the ways people and things are in the real world => their truth.</p> <p>As Truth is infinite, and the world is a rich and complex reality, I can always come to know and understand myself, other people and things more and better.</p> <p>Openness to learning, knowing, through and with other people.</p> <p>Value and importance of reflection on my real life</p>

		<p>experience and that of others as a way of learning and knowing.</p> <p>To ascertain the truth of the knowledge I acquire, I need to compare and contrast it with the way things, people are in the real world, and with other peoples' ideas on the same and other issues.</p> <p>The value of other peoples' testimony regarding my personal truthfulness as a way of validating my claims to developing new knowledge that is true: Truthful person => acts to seek the truth => tests the truthfulness of their claims to new knowledge => new knowledge validated by others as true in itself and based on the truthfulness of the person who claims to have developed this knowledge.</p>
Axiology		<p>ARLT allows me to incorporate my personal values as valid reference points within my research.</p> <p>It thus respects the unity of my personal being, where my values are part of who I am, how I think, act, want, etc.</p>
Research paradigm		<p>My worldview is based on the harmony that exists between faith and reason, the human and the divine.</p> <p>Faith in a Supreme Personal Being whom I can know through reason and revelation.</p> <p>Knowledge of God can enlighten my intellectual understanding of the world, people, situations, etc.</p> <p>The One God makes Himself known in different ways through the various religions and in the human person; this gives rise to many basic principles of action which are commonly held across religious beliefs and among all people, even those who do not believe in God.</p>
Interpretative framework		<p>Strive not to impose a given interpretation when seeking to understand myself, other people, events, etc.</p> <p>Seek the real, true meaning of myself, my actions, other people and events, with the light of the</p>

		classical philosophy of being, personalist anthropology and divine revelation as expressed in Christian Theology
Approaches to inquiry / research strategy	<p><u>Methodological assumptions:</u> Do research on oneself in the company of others.</p> <p>Start with a concern; use a developmental process of action-reflection cycles; demonstrate relationships of influence.</p> <p>Research one's practice to improve it with on-going new beginnings / change.</p>	<p>Reflective narrative to account for my past and present knowledge and experience.</p> <p>Self-enquiry, using personal reflection on my actions and those of my students in a search for deeper understanding and meaning.</p> <p>Use of action-reflection cycles to facilitate this process.</p> <p>Quest for feedback and validation from those who know me, in particular my students, regarding my claims to new knowledge.</p> <p>Key: use my Christian intellect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify my personal values and assess how I live them in my teaching practice. - offer an explanation of my teaching practice in the light of my personal values.
Others	<p><u>Social assumptions:</u> Improve workplace practice through improving learning. Promote democratic evaluation of learning and practices. Create good social orders by influencing the education of social formations. Researchers/practitioners need to hold themselves accountable for their educational influences on society.</p>	<p>Research my teaching practice to facilitate personal transformation in myself and my students through my teaching, so that together we can make our world a better place.</p>

Towards my living educational theory

Currently the educational values which act as my living standards of judgement (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) are those of fostering interpersonal love, respect for one's own and other people's freedom and encouraging personal growth in my students and myself in various areas. In summary they involve "understanding educational relationships as a spiration of love in freedom for personal transformation". This expression is inspired, through analogy, by my understanding of the Christian mystery of the Blessed Trinity, which I have studied and taught as a unit in Theology for many years.

The more I have worked at improving my teaching practice over the last six years, the more I realize the importance of educational relationships, between myself and my students and among the students themselves, in achieving transformative learning in us all. The better, and warmer the relationships we establish, the more open the students seem to be to learning, and the more I can achieve in helping them to learn and to change themselves through the learning process.

When I ask myself what motivates me to try to establish good relations with my students, I realize that it is my love for them as persons, whom I want to help become the best persons they can be. At the same time, I realize that they can be prevented from developing themselves as persons by fear, peer pressure, and negative relations with their fellow students. This is why I need to try to help them open up to, accept, learn from and love each other, so that they can feel comfortable in their learning environment. Hence, my love for them needs to be received by them, assimilated and extended to each other to facilitate learning.

Finally, I realize that I cannot force anyone to learn, or to love! I greatly appreciate, value and respect my own personal freedom and, hence, I try to respect other peoples' freedom too. So, as I try to foster loving relationships with my students and among themselves, I need to do it in a manner which respects everyone's' freedom. This is certainly a challenge, as there is a goal to be achieved; however, with time, experience and reflection, I try to identify different ways of encouraging my students to use their freedom to create these positive relationships because they want to. Over the years, we have achieved this together in varying ways and degrees and each semester I look for new ways of achieving these goals. Evidently, if the students freely take up the opportunities I offer them in this regard, they end up transforming themselves, as they have to struggle to work together in a respectful and "loving" teaching and learning

environment; the effectiveness largely depends, not only on myself and my attitude, but also on them⁵.

As I reflect on these processes and the dynamism of the loving relationships with respect for each other which we try to create within the classroom and beyond, to facilitate transformative learning, I realize that the dynamics are somewhat similar to those within the inner life of the One and Triune God, the Blessed Trinity.

Following the revelation of Jesus Christ as taught by the Church He founded, I believe that the mystery of God is made up of three divine persons who subsist as the One True God. As an ancient Profession of Faith expresses it: “This is what the Catholic faith teaches: we worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in Unity. We distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance. For the Father is a distinct person; the Son is a distinct person; and the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. Still the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty” (Athanasian Creed, nos. 3-6). This is not the place to explain this mystery in itself, I simply quote this text to indicate my source of inspiration for understanding the educational relationships I strive to foster in my teaching practice.

Bearing in mind the obvious differences between the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and my students and I, there are certain elements within the theological explanation of this mystery which somehow coincide with my experience in the classroom:

Blessed Trinity⁶	My teaching and learning environment
Plurality of persons (three different persons)	Plurality of persons (my students and I)
Oneness of the divine nature which is common to the three divine persons	Unity we wish to establish among ourselves, while respecting our diversity
Basis of the interaction of the three divine persons among themselves: their interpersonal relationships	My students and I all need to interact with each other for effective learning: we need to establish interpersonal relationships
Explanatory key to their interpersonal relations: love that is eternally given and received among the persons, in a manner similar to a spiral	Possible key to establishing good interpersonal relations in my teaching and learning environment: I offer love to my students; they receive that love and, moved by it, offer it to others, who can also receive it and offer it to others in an on-going manner which we could compare to a spiral => foster a spiral or spiration of love which

⁵ As this paper focuses on the methodological aspects of my research, this is not the place to explain the work I have carried out and the evidence I have gathered to support these findings.

⁶ There are multiple sources for accessing Church teachings on the Trinitarian mystery, and the various attempts at explaining this mystery down through the centuries. For the sake of simplicity in this context, I limit myself to indicating the following key source: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: numbers 232-267.

	moves from one person to another
God is Absolute, Perfect and Supreme Being; as such, He is Perfect Freedom. The loving interaction among the three divine persons is carried out in perfect freedom.	For our educational relationships to be based on a spiration of genuine love among ourselves, we need to use our freedom; we need to choose to love and freely strive to foster that love among ourselves, while respecting each other's freedom =>spiration of love in freedom
The Blessed Trinity, as God is perfect; inner life of the Trinity is a life of perfect love and freedom	As we strive to use our freedom to create and develop loving relationships among ourselves, we improve our interpersonal relations, our learning environment and we transform ourselves by making ourselves better persons =>spiration of love in freedom facilitates personal growth and transformation
	Improved educational relationships, created by fostering a spiration of love in freedom among ourselves which helps transform us into better persons, ultimately facilitates and improves the quality of teaching and learning in that environment

In summary, I have come to understand that the values which motivate me in my teaching (interpersonal love, freedom, personal growth and transformation), are essential in establishing educational relationships which facilitate effective teaching and learning. These are the core elements of my living educational theory (the theory of education which I have developed and strive to live in practice every day) which, with the help of the analogy with the Trinitarian mystery, I express as *Understanding educational relationships as a spiration of love in freedom for personal transformation.*

Conclusion

In this paper I have explained action research living theory, the methodology which I have chosen for my doctoral research. Keeping in mind that it is not well known in East Africa, although it is becoming familiar to researchers in South Africa, I have tried to explain how it compares and contrasts with traditional research within the social sciences. In this process, I hope to have clarified why I chose this methodology and how I have adapted it to the philosophical assumptions behind my research. I have also tried to give an overview of the living educational theory which I am developing, making use of the living theory methodology which action research living theory has allowed me to create. The paper does not aim to give a full picture of my educational research, but rather, to test my capacity to explain my methodology to a new audience, and open up the floor for questions, clarifications, suggestions and debate. I look forward to receiving your comments and contributions.

References

Catechism of the Catholic Church: numbers 232-267.

Clandinin, D.J., Pushor, D. & Murray Orr, A. (2007). Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education* 2007 58: 21.

Clandinin, D. J. (Ed.). (2006). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Corey. S. (1953). *Action Research to Improve School Practice*. New York. Teachers College Press.

Crawford, F., Dickinson, J., & Leitmann, S. (2002). Mirroring Meaning Making: Narrative Ways of Reflecting on Practice for Action. *Qualitative Social Work* 2002 1: 170.

Creswell, J.W., (2003). *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks. Sage.

Dadds, M. & Hart, S. (2001). *Doing Practitioner Research Differently*. London. RoutledgeFalmer.

Dick, B. (2004). Action research literature: Themes and trends. *Action Research* 2004 2: 425.

----- (2006). Action research literature 2004-2006: Themes and trends. *Action Research* 2006 4: 439.

----- (2009). Action research literature 2006--2008: Themes and trends. *Action Research* 2009 7: 423.

----- (2010). Action research literature 2008-2010: Themes and trends. *Action Research* published online 29th December 2010.

Dick, B., Stringer, E. & Huxham, C. (2009). Theory in action research. *Action Research* 2009 7: 5.

- Friedman, V. & Rogers, T. (2009). There is nothing so theoretical as good action research. *Action Research* 2009 7: 31.
- Gustavsen, B. (2008). Action research, practical challenges and the formation of theory. *Action Research* 2008 6: 421.
- Hussein, J. W. (2008). An existential approach to engaging adult learners in the process of legitimizing and constructing meanings from their narrative knowledge. *Action Research* 2008 6: 391.
- Jasper, M. A. (2005). Using reflective writing within research. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 2005 10: 247.
- Karpiak, I. E. (2003). The Ethnographic, the Reflective, and the Uncanny: Three "Tellings" of Autobiography. *Journal of Transformative Education* 2003 1: 99.
- Kinsella, E. (2007). Embodied Reflection and the Epistemology of Reflective Practice. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2007.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues* 2 (4): 34-46.
- Moon, J. (2008). *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development. Theory and Practice*. London. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Ramsey, C. (2005). Narrative: From learning in reflection to learning in performance. *Management Learning* 2005 36: 219.
- Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.) (2001). *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. London. Sage.
- Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.) (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd edition). London. Sage.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students* (5th edition). Prentice Hall (Pearson Education). Harlow (UK).
- Serper, A. (2010). *An Analytical Critique, Deconstruction, And Dialectical Transformation And Development Of The Living Educational Theory Approach*. University of Bath. [Can be accessed at <http://www.actionresearch.net>]

Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*. New York. Basic Books.

Schön, D. (1995). Knowing in action: the new scholarship requires a new epistemology. *Change*. November-December: 27-34.

Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London. Heinemann.

Whitehead, J. (1989). Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' *Cambridge Journal of Education*. 19(1). 41–52.

Whitehead, J. & McNiff, J. (2006). *Action Research Living Theory*. London. Sage.

Whitehead, J. (2008). Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *Educational Journal of Living Theories* 1(1): 103-126.

Whitehead, J. (2009a). "Generating living theory and understanding in action research studies". *Action Research* 2009 7: 85.

Whitehead, J. (2009b). "How do I influence the Generation of Living Educational Theories for Personal and Social Accountability in Improving Practice? Using a Living Theory Methodology in Improving Educational Practice". Tidwell, D.L., Heston, M.L. & Fitzgerald, L.M. (eds.) (2009). *Research Methods for the Self-study of Practice*. Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices, 9. Springer: 172-194.

Whitehead, Jack. (2010). "As an Educator and Educational Researcher, How Do I Improve What I Am Doing and Contribute to Educational Theories That Carry Hope for the Future of Humanity?". *i.e.: inquiry in education: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 2*.

[Accessed on 2nd November 2011 from: <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol1/iss2/2>].

Whitehead, J. (2011). "Developing a relationally dynamic epistemology for educational knowledge". Paper to support the presentation at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference (7th September 2011). Institute of Education of the University of London. [Accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/>]

Winter, R. Griffiths, M. & Green, K. (2000). The Academic Qualities of Practice: what are the criteria for a practice-based PhD? *Studies in Higher Education*. 25: 25-37.

Wood, L., (2009). The transformative potential of living theory educational research. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*. Volume 3(1): 105-118 [Accessed from www.ejolts.net]

Wood, L., Morar, T. & Mostert, L. (2007). "From rhetoric to reality: The role of living theory action research in transforming education". *Education as Change* 11 (2), 67-80.

Young, J. (2010). *The Scope of Philosophy*. Leominster: Gracewing.