My Methodology

Be the change you wish to see in the world

Mahatma Gandhi

LET
US
Visualise
A
Way
Forward

There's Method in
My Madness

Chapter Four

Methodology: There is Method in My Madness

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What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.
And when we bring what is within us out into the world, miracles happen.
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882)

Introduction

The idiom in the title of this chapter comes from Hamlet by William Shakespeare, Polonius speaking: 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in it', referring to the fact that although Hamlet appeared mad he knew exactly what he was doing. I use this title for two reasons: Firstly as a way of introducing the Living Educational Theory methodology that for many appears as having methods which are unconventional and for many positivists may personify madness. Secondly, I regularly use these words when teaching my students as I humorously stress the need for them to trust in my teaching methods. Although these methods may appear to be incongruent with the traditional approach to teaching research design, I see it as opportunistic to creatively teach both methodological content and multimedia skills simultaneously. This is keeping with my educational entrepreneurial spirit that I will explore further in the epistemology section.

In this chapter, I outline the various approaches to action research. I focus on the Living Educational Theory (LET) approach developed by Jack Whitehead (1989) and explain why it is the most appropriate choice for my research study. I discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning my methodological stance, and the data collection methods employed. I address the ethical issues involved and explain how I ensured academic rigour by adhering to Winter's six criteria for an action research approach and Habermas' criteria of social validity. Throughout this chapter I use educational information graphics, or educational infographics, through which I claim to be able to convey knowledge innovatively and creatively to engage the reader effectively.

Educational Research - For the Greater Good

In her book *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise advice for new action researchers*, McNiff (1997, p.12) states: 'While it might be true that you cannot change the world, you can certainly change your bit of it; and if everyone changed a small bit at a time, a lot of change could happen quickly'. Fifteen years later, Ball and Tyson (2011) stated that the mission of the

American Educational Research Association (AERA) is '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'. Both women speak from many years of working in education and talk about improving the world for the greater good, however small that change might be. If we are to accept the view that research is 'to encourage scholarly inquiry', with a hope of 'serving the public good', then it is important to choose a methodology that allows us do this.

I have always been interested in questions of a philosophical nature, especially if they led me to contribute to the greater good. Like Socrates (470 BC) (cited in Johnson and Reed 2008, p.23-24), I felt I would come to know my own ignorance by questioning and interpreting the knowledge of others, and would find the truth through debate and discussion. However idealistic this idea, it was one of the reasons I pursued a Bachelor in Religious Science (B. Rel. Sc) degree, in Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin. I wanted to be a religion teacher and to teach in a caring way that would serve the greater good. Noddings (1986), the philosopher, suggests that if a teacher holds values of care and trust, the student will respond by working harder and learning those same values. This form of modeling teaches the student these values. It is no surprise that a caring and trustworthy religion teacher influenced my career decision: the cycle of teaching trust perpetuates itself and, simultaneously, creates a better learning environment and better world in general.   This was an ideal towards which I wanted to strive.

Not a particularly religious person, although a spiritual one, I did believe passionately in values of truth, care, and empathy, as discussed in the Ontology section. I knew teaching Religion would afford me an opportunity to instill these values in others. This degree included Philosophy and Education as key components. The French philosopher Descartes (1596-1650) (cited in Illeris 2007, p.9) said 'je pense donc je suis', or 'I think therefore I am'. For me, there is no point in existing if we do not understand why and for what we exist. This belief prompted me to ask questions all my life to improve whatever situation I was in at the time. I used my youth and education as vehicles of self-discovery. Through this type of self-discovery one can journey into an authentic selfhood, (Palmer, 1997). Eisner (1993) says we ask questions, and carry out research, in an effort to comprehend more fully what we are trying to do. It is through constant questioning that I hope to understand the meaning of life and contribute to the greater good.

My Ontological Stance

The importance of knowing oneself has been espoused by philosophers throughout the ages. St Augustine (354BC) (cited in Johnson and Reed 2008, p.44-46) articulates that we do not create meaning by text alone but rather require experiences and realities from within ourselves in order to learn. Without examining the varying beliefs of others during my studies in Mater Dei, I might not have acquired a sound foundation for establishing a meaning to my life. Exploring other religions and philosophies, through literature and discussion, called on me to question my beliefs and establish my true feelings rather than just accepting what I had come to know as the norm. Being part of a like-minded community, of similar cultural background, helped to provide me with a foundation for exploring and understanding myself. A heightened self-awareness was an unwritten learning outcome of my undergraduate degree. The nature of subjects such as Moral Theology, Ethics and Scripture called on me to think about my own life and involved asking myself questions such as: 'why do I do the things I do and why am I the way I am?' Mater Dei strove to provide a reflective environment promoting sound ideals. I am not sure whether it achieved these aims fully, but I did become very familiar with the language around reflection and the cyclical nature of reflecting 'on' and 'in' action (Schön, 1983). The small, intimate nature of the college, while it had its benefits, also contributed to fostering a somewhat disingenuous environment where students felt compelled to conform to what was expected rather than learning to think critically. I felt silenced then, but experience and accumulated wisdom allow me to voice my opinion now without fear of consequences and in the hope that it might give rise to some positive reflection leading to an outcome for the greater good.

In my own teaching, I am very mindful that students may be reluctant to express themselves for fear of a negative outcome. Consequently, I always ensure that students know that their own tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958) is valued and that we can *co-create* a valuable learning environment together. Over time, with research, collaboration and support, students on the Masters in Education and Training (eLearning) MEME, learn to appreciate that they can fulfil their own potential. They come to realise that I am a support on their journey but that I do not hold the power exclusively. They learn that they are instrumental in creating their own knowledge and, hence, their own epistemology. Their appreciation of these facts is vital to their learning journey.

Mater Dei Institute advocated excellent teaching strategies that provided a sound foundation as I set out on my teaching career. One of these strategies, spearheaded by Dr Andrew Mc Grady, included

microteaching and was way ahead of its time. I was required to teach a group of second-level students a teaching strategy for six minutes, an exercise that took place in a video recording studio. I had to watch the recording later and reflect on how I could improve this skill for the next microteaching session. This reflection tool was used almost 20 years ahead of the YouTube explosion yet it planted a seed of the crucial role video can play in providing evidence on which a practitioner can reflect later. I was unaware of the terminology at that time, but my way of being in the world or *ontological perspective,* mirrored an action research methodological approach that I came to appreciate for my research inquiries many years later. I wrote a poem to explain to my students what having an ontological stance means. I later made it into an animation using Xtra-normal software as seen in (video 4.1). 'Xtranormal is an online animation package that uses text-to-speech software. Users create movies using stock animated characters and sets. Users can add their own script which is automatically lip-synched to the characters.' (Gallagher, 2011, p 87).

Video 4.1. My Ontological Stance - (Crotty, 2012)

My Worldview Determines my Methodological Choice Framed in a Language of Respect

In her doctoral abstract, Walton (2008) writes that through telling her personal story she offers an emergent methodology that includes both narrative inquiry and action research. Her use of narrative appeals to me and the use of 'personally relevant theory from personally relevant experience' (Dick, 2006) is a method I also enjoy using throughout my thesis. Whitehead (2011)

suggests that it helps to integrate insights from socio-cultural and socio-historical theories of the day that explain my educational influences. This relates to how the socio-cultural and socio-historical of the day, as outlined in my Ontology section, has influenced me.

> *One of things that I admire in my mother and father is the respectful manner in which they have always spoken to people young or old. They have always treated people with dignity and considered each opinion as important as the next, irrespective of someone's age. If they could be of help in adding to another's knowledge base by explaining any concept in general conversation, they were more than happy to do so. Yet they were also mindful to use accessible language so that even the youngest of people could partake in any given conversation. As teachers, they held the philosophy that if people felt positive from being involved in a good intellectual conversation it would encourage them to seek a deeper understanding of the topic later rather than dismiss it forever. I recall my mother referring to children as "little people" who would one day grow up. There was a sense from my father that just because people do not have sophisticated language or experience at a specific place in time does not mean they do not have the intelligence and potential to have it at another time - given the proper opportunity.*

Figure 4.1. Respect for Language

My inclination to use narrative grounded in experience, a philosophy put forward by Dewey (1938) Connelly and Clandinin (1988), and Eisner (1993), calls on me to recount my experience from the past as I attempt to give the reader an insight into my world view and provide an explanation of the importance of language in including researchers from other paradigms or worldviews. A paradigm provides a conceptual framework for seeing and making sense of the social world; 'to be located in a particular paradigm is to view the world in a particular way' (Burrell and Morgan, 1997, p.24).

I introduce the following narrative as a way of explaining the idea of a paradigm, and the language within the various paradigms. I value inclusion, so if I use language that is exclusive to one research paradigm or methodology, it is my belief that I am not inviting people from another research paradigm into the research conversation.

I care that people feel included so I need to use language that is familiar to all. I respect other people's opinions or worldviews but to admire them I have to understand them. To understand them, I have to invest time to develop an informed opinion. My values are part of who I am, so I cannot separate myself as person from myself as researcher. I respect other people's ways of carrying out research. What they do, may not be what I would do, but I realise that certain types of research call for particular methodologies and methods.

I believe it is my responsibility to help others understand the methodology and the language I use when talking about the LET methodology, to avoid the problematic issue raised by Dressman (2008), that the language used by many academic researchers is written in a way that 'resists reading' (p.15). I believe this is important so that any researcher can obtain an overall perspective of my choice of methodology in relation to their own. The use of narrative helps me to document my thoughts. Through recounting the various significant times in my life, irrespective of whether they were successful, I gain a greater understanding of what I am doing in my personal and professional life. Whitehead (2008a) refers to these unsuccessful times as 'narrative wreckage'. These difficult periods can be challenging to document, but they are as valuable a learning experience as any victory narrative.

Action Research

The social psychologist Kurt Lewin is recognised as the person who developed action research, in the sense of research leading to social action, while he worked for community action programmes in the USA. Lewin's (1946) model of action research consisted of six stages: 1) analysis; 2) fact finding; 3) conceptualisation; 4) planning; 5) implementation of action; 6) evaluation. This model has been developed further since Lewin's formulation. In action research, the researcher identifies a problem for change or improvement. A distinctive feature of action research is its 'participatory character', as outlined by Lewin with the aim 'to improve and to involve'. This is expanded by Carr and Kemmis:

> Action research aims at improvement in three areas: firstly, the improvement of a practice; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of the practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place. The aim of involvement stands shoulder to shoulder with the aim of improvement. (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.165)

McNiff (2002) explains that as a result of the explosion of the Action Research family's influence on research its language, approach and focus have diversified. In turn, this means researchers must decide the right action research approach to take while also trying to decipher the correct

terminology to employ within that approach. McNiff broadly categorises the two groups of action researchers into the interpretive action research group and, more specifically, the self-study action research group.   The first group includes such action researchers as John Elliott and Stephen Kemmis and Wilfred Carr, while the second group includes action researchers such as Jack Whitehead. The action research approach enables individuals to strive to improve their own work practices and personal learning (McNiff 1997, 2010). Collectively, we can make a difference and change our futures, with curiosity, creativity and a willingness to engage (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006).

Carr and Kemmis

Carr and Kemmis (1986) defined action research as research into practice by practitioners for education and those involved in the practices that constitute education (p.199). The authors called for more *'critical'* and *'emancipatory',* action research and advocated the need to bring about change to society through focusing on the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) as the conduit. To quote Carr and Kemmis:

> Action Research is simply a form of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.162)
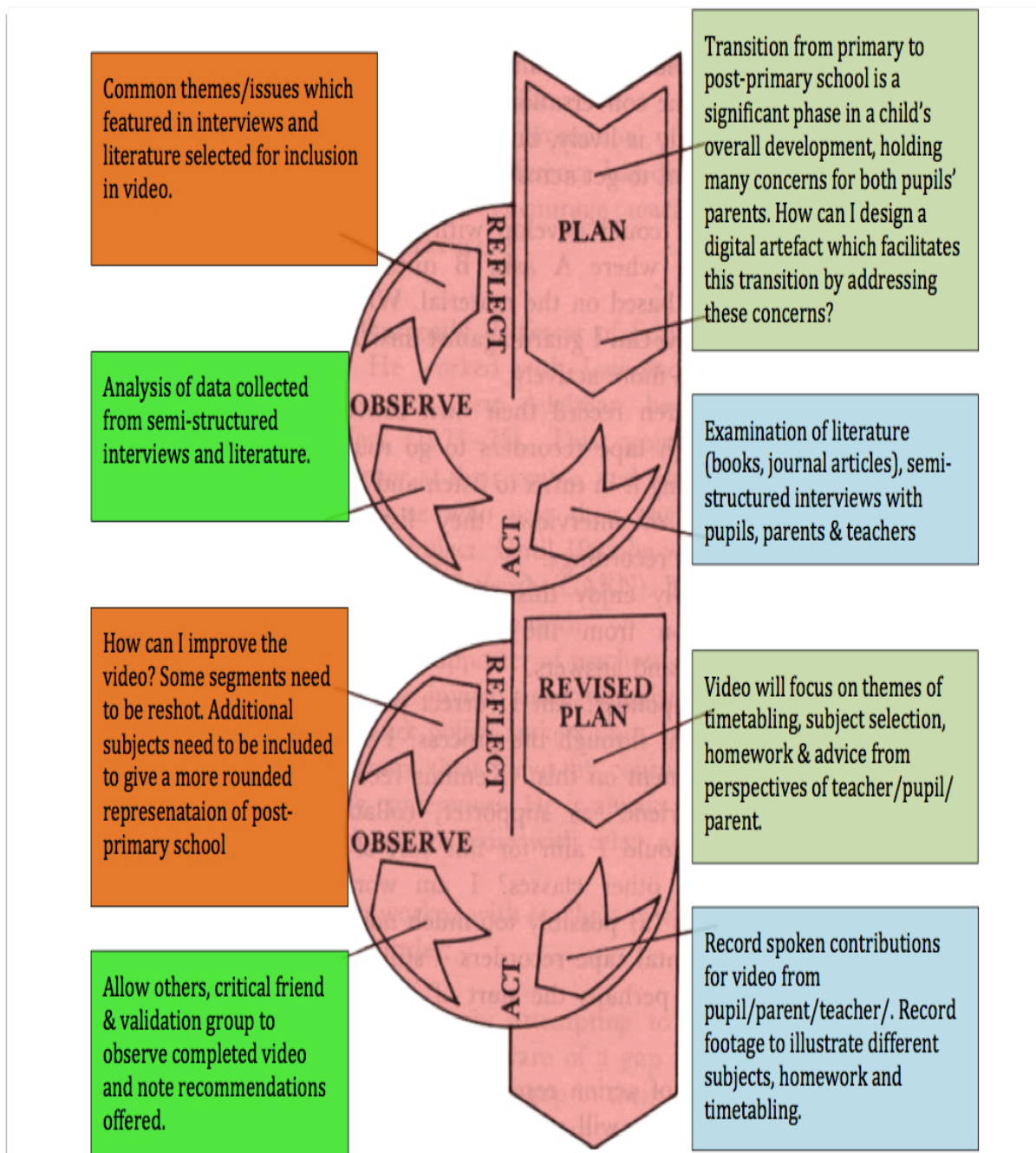
Figure 4.2. Chris Hickson's Research using Carr and Kemmis' Model

To give an example of how someone would apply this particular action research model, I have taken Chris Hickson, a student on the MEME programme, as an example of a person who adopted the Kemmis model for his dissertation. This model was the most appropriate action research approach to use because his concern, as a primary school teacher in a rural area, centred around significant issues that arose for pupils as they make the transition from primary to post-primary school. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) (2008) has similar social concerns about this transition

being a critical period in a pupil's educational journey. Chris wanted to produce a video that would best address the issues that arise in the course of primary pupils' transition to post-primary school. Although Chris's study *might* indirectly impact on his practice, this study was carried out primarily to improve the social setting and help children and parents in his school understand what the transition involved and how they might be better prepared.

Chris's inquiry takes a social practice as its subject matter and proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. It involves those responsible for the practice in each of the stages of the video production, gradually widening participation in the study to include others. The visual or educational infographic of the Kemmis model (Figure 4.2) demonstrates how Chris has analysed and synthesised his findings from interviewing parents, teachers and pupils coupled with reading relevant literature. He used thematic analysis (Matthews and Ross 2010), which involved examining the data to classify significant topics that could be then included in his video. The stakeholders were later called upon once more to evaluate the video in order to see if any more improvements could be made to enhance it.
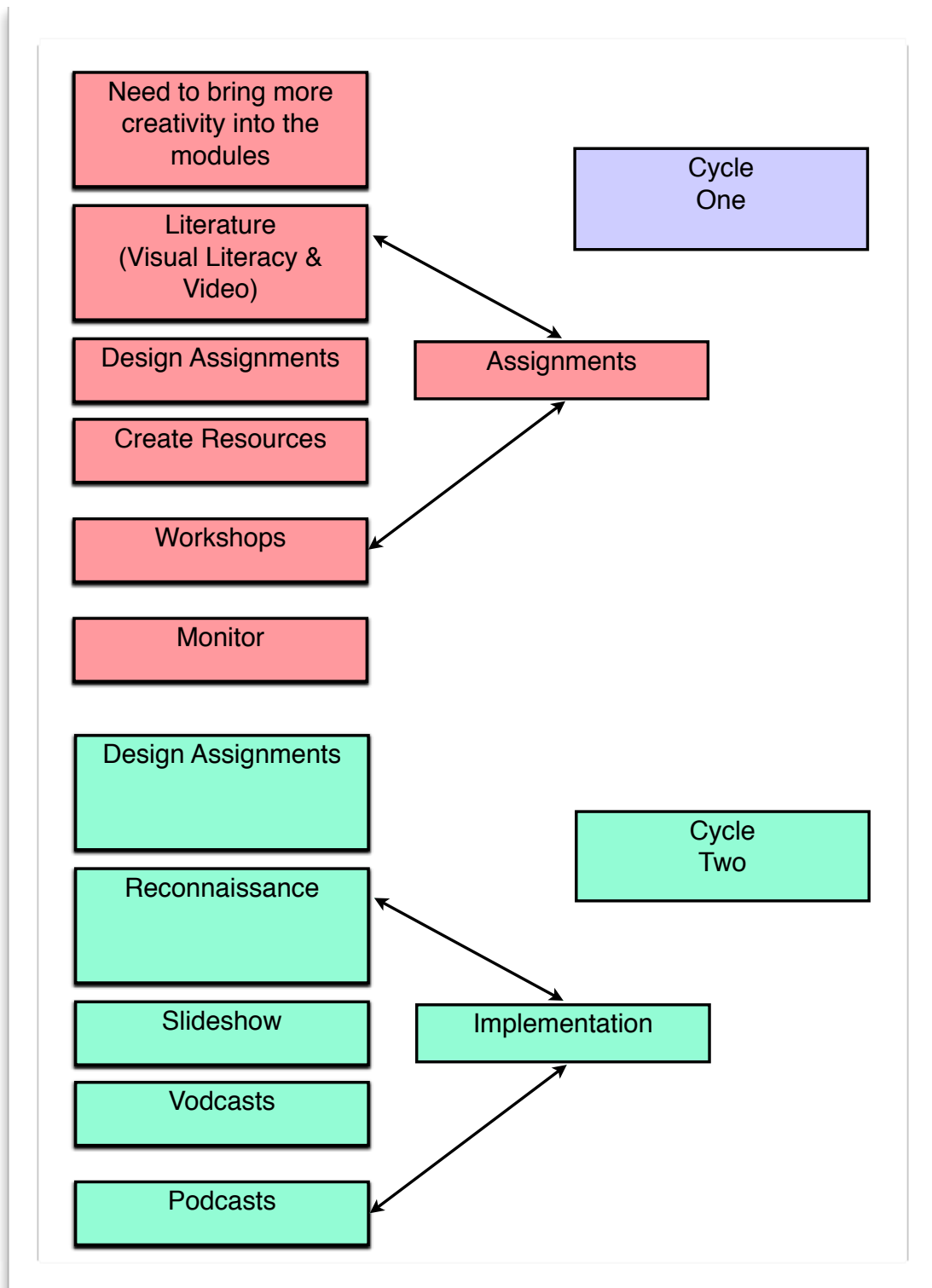
Elliott's model of Action Research

John Elliott was a founder of the Classroom Action Research Network (CARN) in 1976. Now known as the Collaborative Action Research Network, it was established to provide support for teachers engaged in action research into 'inquiry /discovery learning', as part of the Ford Teaching Project. This project preceded the Humanities Curriculum project in which Elliott was involved with Lawrence Stenhouse who founded the Centre for Applied Research in University at the University of East Anglia in the UK. Stenhouse was particularly influential in developing the idea of research as 'systematic enquiry made public' (1980, p.1) and believed that it is not enough that teachers work should be studied: they need to study it themselves' (Stenhouse, 1975, p.143). Elliott (1991) looked at Lewin's model - plan, act, reflect, revise - and felt it needed to be developed further to reflect what was happening in practice for the teachers he worked with. For Elliott, Lewin's model was far too linear. He considered that analysis should take place more within the model, with regular reflection helping his teachers to think about why they were doing what they were doing and take more action steps to improve their practice. In his words:

> The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilisation of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim.
>
> (Elliott, 1991, p.49)

If I am to situate my research within the approach to action research advocated by Elliott, I must engage in the reflection cycles that normally characterise action research approaches. To adopt Elliott's research model, for example, would allow me as an insider researcher to carry out some reconnaissance work through reading literature and watching YouTube, taking photos and making resources in the form of video or podcasts to find out what type of assignments might work best to promote creativity. Equipped with my newfound knowledge, I would progress to take some *action steps* to implement these assignments. One action step might correspond to one section of an assignment. Taking these action steps in implementing innovative teaching methods would aim to encourage the production of creative assignments. These action steps and their implementation and action are integral to the Elliott process. Monitoring whether each action step provides the necessary feedback to improve future videos podcasts and resources. Finally, I would revise the earlier steps based on whether the evidence I observed called for change. Further fact-finding and analysis might be necessary to explain where the assignments have failed to achieve their aim, after which the general assignment might need to be revised.

Figure 4.3. Example of my Research using Elliott's model

This methodological approach does not require the researcher to articulate their values. Elliot's model did not resonate with me in the same way as the living educational theory methodology; my ontological perspective calls on me to use a methodology over which I can stand publicly in a way

that is not separate from who I claim to be as an academic within an educational higher-level practice.

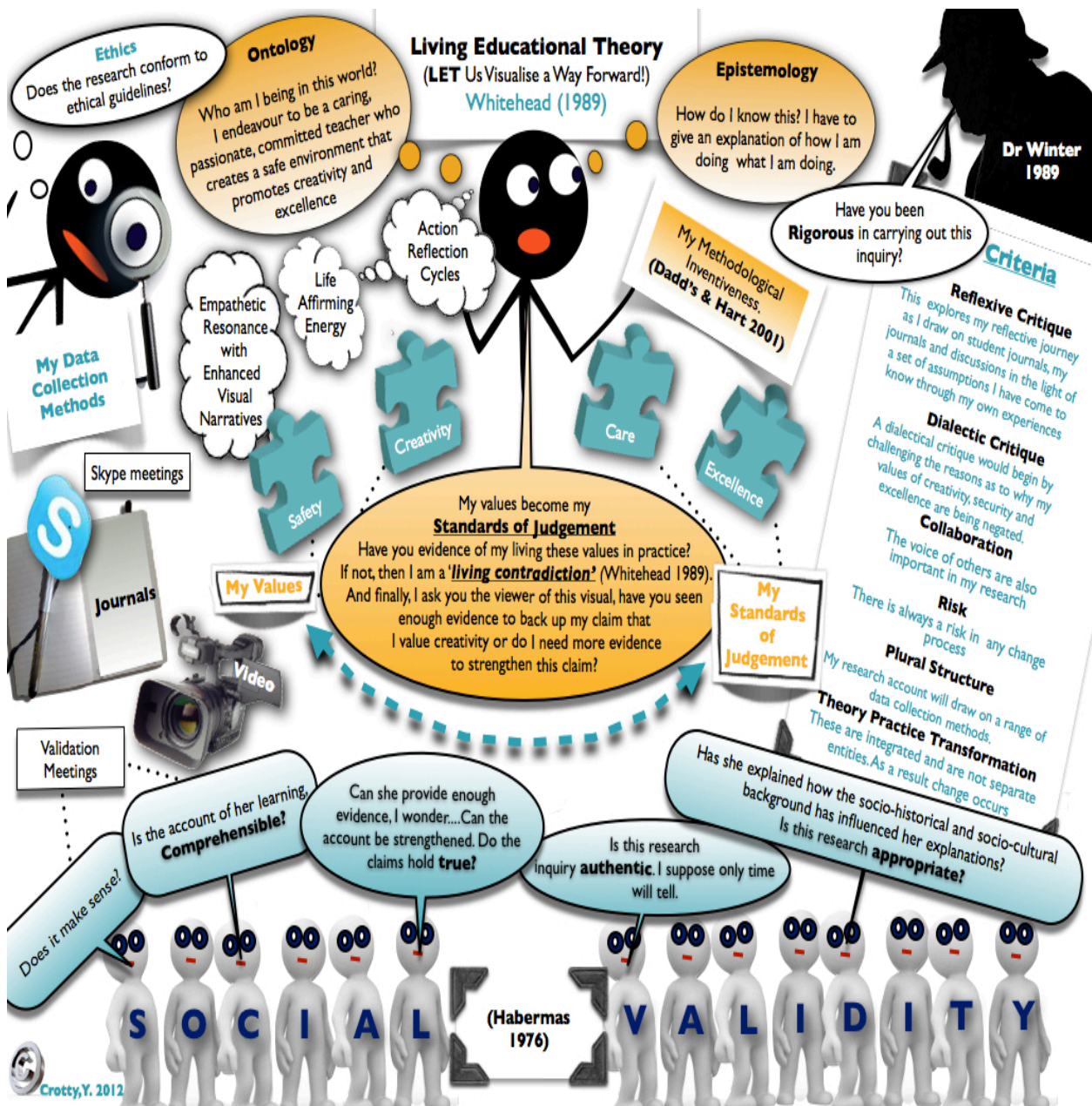**Figure 4.4.** Living Educational Theory - LET us Visualise a Way Forward (Crotty, 2012)

Living Educational Theory - LET us visualise a way forward

Before breaking down the composite parts of the LET methodology, I will give a brief overview as presented in Figure 4.4. I will provide conceptual clarity around the language later in this chapter. The idea of visualising a way forward is an important focus for this particular

methodology. As a researcher using LET, I am in the middle of the educational infographic because I am central to the research process. This is a values based self-study. Improving my own practice, while creating new knowledge, is paramount. This concept is depicted by the jigsaw pieces displayed beside the main research character, representing safety, creativity care and excellence. When situations are at odds with what I believe, and my values are being denied while I try to improve my practice, then I see myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989).

Who I am as both a person and researcher has been defined by the many experiences I have previously encountered. Who I am in the world, and why and how I do the things I do, defines my ontological perspective. It also gives rise to the knowledge I create, my epistemology. These two words are placed at the top of the infographic because they are key starting points to any methodology. The words, and what they mean, are inextricably linked. In the LET methodology, this knowledge or epistemology is created through action reflection cycles, through life-affirming energy and with empathetic resonance. This empathetic resonance means 'to communicate a feeling of the immediate presence of the other in communicating the energy-flowing values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life' (Whitehead 2012 p.7).

In contemplating my ontological and epistemological stance, I liberate my methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) and contextualise the choice of methods with which I am most comfortable and that are in keeping with my values. To demonstrate the close relation, I have placed the LET methods below the title and the words ontology and epistemology on the infographic. (Figure 4.4)

This research approach is not without rigour because I must have evidence to back up my claims to new knowledge and ensure that I am not a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989). I collect data through the use of video, online journals and I record Skype meetings that will later become evidence to validate my work. These data collection methods are all visible to the left hand side of the infographic. I apply Winter's six criteria of rigour (1989) which are displayed on the right, Reflexive Critique, Dialectic Critique, Collaboration, Risk, Plural Structure and Theory, Practice, Transformation. The research is validated using Habermas's (1976) four criteria of social validity; Comprehensibility, Truth, Authenticity and Appropriateness. These are inserted at the

bottom of the chart and link into the validation meetings that provide an opportunity for researchers to make their work public.

LET - For the Greater Good

A living educational theory produced by an individual (Whitehead, 1989) is an explanation of that individual's educational influence, in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work. In keeping with my ideals, and those voiced by Ball and Tyson (2011), I would like my research to be about improving my practice for the greater good. As a teacher, I have always been motivated to help others. If I can do that by documenting what I have learned throughout my educational experiences through the written word or in enhanced visual narratives, then I see it as a very worthwhile task. The visual narratives I describe are Enhanced Visual Narrative Productions and use techniques within video production. I use Farren and Whitehead's (2006) approach to producing multimedia narratives as valid multimedia explanations of learning. However, the visual narratives I describe are all produced to enhance their educational content. They are time-consuming to design, develop and produce. This is a development in my thinking since I co-wrote an article with Farren in 2008 on 'visual narratives', (Crotty and Farren, 2009). The term visual narrative did not fully describe the way I was making use of videos with my students. The videos I produce, and empower my students to produce , usually require storyboarding, production and post-production work.

The LET methodological approach provides for improvement through 'scholarly inquiry', (Ball and Tyson, 2011) and contributes to a better world in the process. This methodological approach is not without criticism, however, because people are coming from different paradigms and those from a more scientific background may not be able to see the value in documenting such influence on learning:

> It takes courage and open-mindedness for people accustomed to and trained in 'traditional' research processes to consider and even embrace alternative ways of researching, and of presenting that research. But it will validate forms of research that can convey knowledge not easily encapsulated just within pages of written text and work to overcome those whose knowledge and skills have been, in the past, inappropriately excluded. (Bruce-Ferguson 2008, p.25)

In recent times, LET has evolved from being one of many approaches to action research to being a methodology in its own right (Whitehead, 2008 b). One key idea in this methodology is the living contradiction. This methodology sees the individual as a living contradiction because their values are being negated and they want to find a way forward in order to improve their practice. The

methods of inquiry are guided by this methodological inventiveness and provide great scope for me as a researcher to be creative within my own inquiry as I generate my own living theory.

When Whitehead (2008a) refers to the disciplines approach to educational theory, I am catapulted back to my own undergraduate studies where we learned about the various disciplines of Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology and History of Education. The collective knowledge from these subjects really only crystallised for me when I encountered the embodiment of these subjects on speaking to experienced teachers. They told me their theories on how a student should be managed, a subject might be better approached, policies should be written so unsavoury history might not be repeated. They were not separating the disciplines, but instead were adopting a holistic approach to education that would result in them having an educational influence with far more impact than the knowledge from any one discipline.

Since 1993, with the establishment of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices Group http://sstep.blogs.uoit.ca/ of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Higher Education educators have been exploring the epistemological implications of self-studies for the generation of educational knowledge (Loughran, Hamilton LaBoskey, Russell, 2004). In keeping with my own educational journey so far, it seemed natural to adopt a values-based self-study approach. This approach focuses on the development of an epistemology of practice (Schön, 1983) in which the knowledge generated by professionals through 'reflection in' action and 'reflection on' action is emphasised. Schön (1995) recognised that an action research approach would conflict with the technical rational approach practiced within universities. However, the focus of Dewey (1929) on the artistry of practice asks us to consider what it would mean 'if not knowledge but art is the final flowering of experience, the crown and consummation of nature, and knowledge is only the means by which art, which includes all practice, is enabled to attain its richest development?' (1929, p.4).
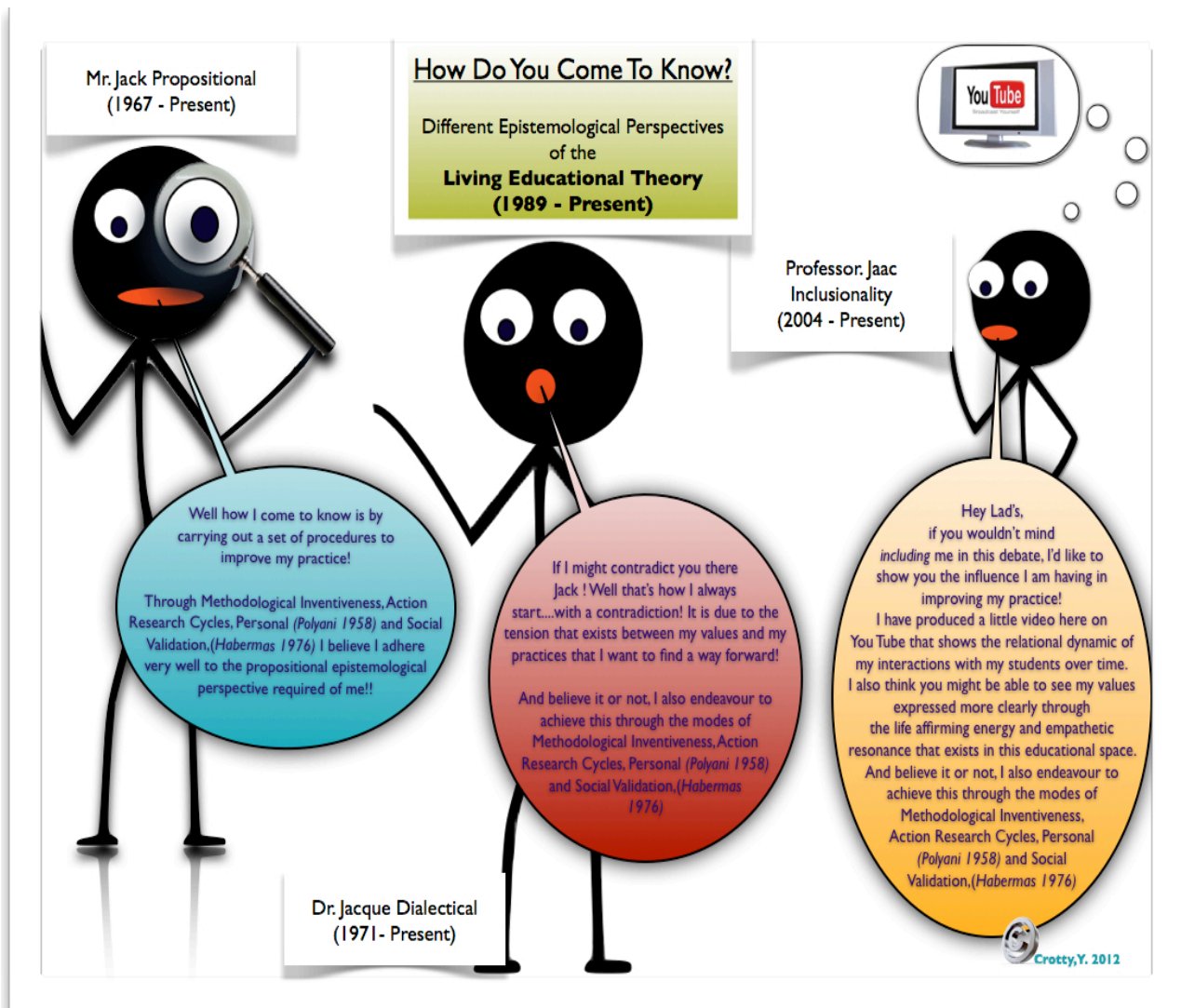
Figure 4.5. How Do You Come to Know? LET - Through the Different Epistemological Lenses.

How Do You Come to Know? LET - Through the Different Epistemological Lenses

In the educational infographic 'How do You Come to Know?' (Figure 4.5.), I depict LET methodology from three different epistemological perspectives. Along with documenting Whitehead's own evolution of the living educational theory, which spans over a forty five year period from 1967-2012, it outlines the different lenses by which the LET methodology can be viewed; from a propositional, dialectical and inclusional perspective.

Each perspective requires different methods to be valid. The propositional looks at the LET methodology to see if there is a set of procedures in place. This perspective interprets LET as having methodological inventiveness, action reflection cycles, narrative and personal and social validation (all terms which will be developed later in the chapter). From a dialectical perspective,

the researcher starts with a contradiction and works to improve it: it is only when we experience poverty that we know what it means to be rich. From this perspective, action reflection cycles are used to work through the values as the practice is improved. Finally, from an inclusional perspective: 'it includes a relationally dynamic and receptive response to the flows of energy and values in a living space' (Whitehead, 2011, p.186). The use of multimedia is a most powerful way to communicate the explanatory flows of the life-affirming energy and this perspective emphasises the importance of representing this type of energy when expounding on educational influences in learning (Whitehead, 2011).

I will take an example of carrying out a study that includes producing a video on creativity. To produce it from a propositional perspective, my focus will be around the procedures and what needs to be put in place so that it is technically correct. The information and the technicalities are the main concern. To produce a video from a dialectical perspective, I start from a point where my value of creativity is negated. An example might be where I create a video that is substandard because of poor lighting or bad sound or one-dimensional because only one camera was used. The video would basically be contrary to what I am trying to show: an aesthetic piece of work. It would be at variance with what creativity is all about. If the video is to be produced from an inclusional perspective, then it should not be one-dimensional and must have an energy that is life-affirming and mediates a message of creativity. There will be a certain connection with the video through the music and it will have a storyline evoking empathy and demonstrating the embodied values of creativity.

A Question of Living Educational Theory

As a living theorist, I am concerned with improving my practice and in particular I am concerned with questions of the kind: 'how do I improve what I am doing?'(Whitehead ,1989). A social scientist might look at a question such as 'what is the relationship between creativity and visual literacy at higher level education?' As an action researcher, I ask the question: 'How am I influencing my students to unearth their creativity and become more visually literate at higher level education?' Taking a living theory approach to action research means that I examine the importance of my unique constellation of values, as I set about carrying out my research. At the same time, I address any concerns I may have around *how* I am improving that practice.

Methodological Inventiveness

My values form the explanatory principles of my practice and are the living standards of judgment that I use and by which I allow others to use to appraise my work. Creativity is a value I espouse to hold as one of my standards of judgment. 'Creativity is any act, idea or product that changes an existing domain into a new one' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p.28). However, if I am working in a restrictive environment where I am discouraged from having new ideas that will change the existing domain for the better then I experience myself as a 'living contradiction'. It appeals to me because this methodological approach further reinforces my value of creativity and allows me to adopt what Dadd's and Hart (2001) refer to as methodological inventiveness:

> If our aim is to create conditions that facilitate methodological inventiveness, we need to ensure as far as possible that our pedagogical approaches match the message that we seek to communicate. 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 of techniques. (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 169)

For example, because I value creativity and inclusion I care that my students and you the reader understand what I am trying to say and are not excluded by inaccessible methodological language. As part of my own methodological inventiveness within the LET methodology, I employ methods such as narrative, creation of visuals and enhanced visual narratives to ensure that people understand my explanations. My ontological perspective drives me to create these visuals because I know they help the process of comprehension and to elucidate what the various concepts mean. When people understand the theory of what they're doing, it helps them to achieve excellence in their endeavours. For this section, I have created an educational infographic to give further clarity to the reader around the living educational methodology. It gives an overview of all the elements that are integral to the methodology and allows people to see at a glance where there are links.

To return to the practical example, I espouse that I value passion and care, creativity and excellence and it lies with you the reader to agree or disagree based on the evidence presented.

Life-Affirming Energy - a LET method

Life-affirming Energy is a term used by Whitehead when referring to the dynamic that exists within an inclusive educational space. To illustrate briefly my understanding of what I believe it to mean is to draw on a story that touches my heart and is particularly poignant at the time of writing. On 20th March 2012, in his adopted city of Melbourne, Australia, a 45-year-old, six foot seven inch Irishman named Jim Stynes passed away.

Photo 4.1. Jim Stynes

Having known Jim as a child because our fathers played Gaelic football together in the Civil Service club in Islandbridge, Dublin, I was particularly saddened by the news of his death. I remembered back to the occasional Sunday when my brother Daragh and I played at the sideline of the pitch in Islandbridge along with Jim and his siblings. It was child's play but sowed a seed for us as a family to take interest in his career as a minor gaelic football player for Dublin and subsequently as an Australian Footy League (AFL) player when he moved to Melbourne in November 1984. He had won an All Ireland Minor gaelic football medal for Dublin two months earlier. From time to time, our family would hear of his accomplishments and delight in the fact that we were once part of his history. Over two years ago, we learned that Jim had cancer. In

Ireland, advertisements announced the documentary 'Every Heart beats true' about their ex-patriot. The feature aimed to show others how he was dealing with his illness. I believe he wished to inspire others to see how resilient people can be when faced with a challenge and how in facing death you can really appreciate life. I was moved by his story and admired the great work he had done and continued to do despite his illness. I was mesmerised by how his life had unfolded and when I learnt of his death I watched many tributes to him and re-watched the documentary on YouTube.

So why do I use this particular Jim Stynes' story to explain Whitehead's life-affirming energy concept? When watching any of the YouTube videos where Jim was speaking, I could see his positive charisma. If I never knew the person (and in reality I did not as I had not known him as an adult), I got a great sense of his values as they flowed with a sense of life-affirming energy through his interactions with others. It is evident that these values remained true and flowed in the same relationally dynamic way in sickness and in health as he influenced other lives in small but tangible ways. Up until his last months, he still sought to make a difference and change the world for the better. The affirming energy that was generated by him, with him and through him was so strong that the pain of his death must be even greater for those who knew him. Yet his death seems to be particularly upsetting for those who did not know him. I can vouch for this. Such was his life-affirming energy that people felt they had a connection with a man they never knew. This is best evidenced through watching his interactions with teenagers throughout his work with the REACH foundation in Australia as seen in video 4.2, 33 minutes into the video and up until 39 minutes and in particular 33.56. Photo 4.1. demonstrates a life-affirming energy that I believe will be missed.

Video 4.2. Every Heart Beats True (2012, Dotty83)

Although Jim was an educator and was given an honorary doctorate from the Australian Catholic University for all his good work, I am unsure whether he was aware of the LET methodology. I have researched to see references to any articles or books he had written that would demonstrate his influence and explicate his theory for how he had made a difference over time. His book *'Heros'* is evidence of his work with the Reach Foundation and his earlier book *'Whatever it Takes'* also documents his influence in the AFL. This literary work is another explanation of how he succeeded through the trials and tribulations that faced him at that time. His work was 'appropriate', 'authentic', 'right', and 'understood', and has been validated by many people around him through the many awards bestowed upon him. The ultimate validation in society was through a state funeral in Australia. Although he may not have been aware of the terminology associated with Living Educational Theory, he was a true living theorist and his story illuminates my understanding of what is means to have values that are expressed in the relational dynamics of educational relationships which carries an 'empathetic resonance' (Whitehead, 2011) that for me holds true.

Action Reflection Cycles

One method of inquiry integral to the LET approach is the use of the action reflection cycles. Whitehead (1989) adopts the action reflection cycle as a way of finding a way forward. I particularly like the shorter version of an action reflection cycle presented by Whitehead in 1989 as it is simple and more suitable for me to use either within a short or longer timeframe:

• I experience problems when my educational values are negated in my practice.
• I imagine ways of overcoming my problems.
• I act on a chosen solution.
• I evaluate the outcomes of my actions.

I have almost always felt that it is possible to live my values even if they are sometimes denied by the circumstances of my practice. Naivety, optimism or foolishness, whatever the mindset, I have always tried to keep moving forward. It was at difficult times that I had to be most creative. Whenever the hopelessness of a situation presented itself to me, I would envisage a way forward because I knew that waiting could mean the denial of another of my values. Visualising a way forward never failed and opportunities always presented alternative routes to help me reach my

goals. I encourage students to think in this way so that they can take control of their own situations and think outside the box in order to move forward.

The use of visuals is part of my methodological inventiveness to support learning, I have created a visual to show an example of reflection cycles and demonstrate how I have systematically improved the management of tension that existed between my values and what needed to be improved in my practice for the purposes of this inquiry. In these reflection cycles, I outline how the use of cameras during validation meetings were a continual source of anxiety to me as I tried to balance capturing quality footage to meet my value of excellence, creating a secure environment for my students to meet my value of safety and being authentic to the students as I validated their work to meet my value of care. So why was the filming of these meetings causing stress? My reflection cycles show how I address this concern to ensure that another method or mode in living educational theory, the importance of life-affirming energy, is best communicated.

Capturing Life-Affirming Energy - A Reflection Cycle Example

Whitehead calls for the need to uncover different forms that best communicate our life-affirming energy. He suggests using video to achieve this objective. While a major proponent of using and producing videos, one technical challenge I faced when trying to demonstrate my influence and life-affirming energy came when recording myself interacting with my students over the duration of this study. The reflection cycles helped me to work through the inquiry to see how I could best capture this life-affirming energy while adhering to my values. The problem presented itself when I, as teacher, also wanted to be a camera person, for more than one camera, and director/producer of each recording (shoot). At least two cameras, preferably three, are needed to capture the most appropriate shots if I am to produce an enhanced visual narrative production that is the best it can be while also being inclusive of the life-affirming energy Whitehead talks about. He suggests that 'inclusionality in educational research is distinguished by these flows of life-affirming energy and a gaze of recognition of the other'. For me to be really inclusional and produce a high quality video resource that best captures this gaze, requires me to have close-up shots of our faces to capture our expressions and tell an authentic story of how we are feeling at any given time during the lecture or validation meeting. These angles also help to communicate the detail needed to demonstrate the 'recognition of the other' that exists in that space. A single camera without a camera-person to zoom in on the facial expressions does not succeed in achieving this outcome in the same engaging way.

As a producer, I am aware that it is more difficult to sustain any viewer's attention if footage is taken from the same angle.

Video 4.3. Validation meeting - Using One Camera (Crotty 2012)

Footage from two or more cameras allows me in post- production to switch from a wide shot to a close up. This helps the viewer get a sense of what is happening with an individual student and also to understand the relational dynamic that exists in the context of the individual's peers.

Ideally, I would also have liked to have each student wear a radio microphone. To 'wire' fifteen students would, however, be very problematic logistically. My students are studying in their own time and it can be difficult for them to find time to fit their studies into busy schedules. To spend time setting up individual microphones would be trying for them and life-affirming energy would certainly be lost in the process.

It is very important that students feel secure when in any learning environment of which I am a part. I strive to foster a natural environment where students can be themselves and trust everybody present. I work very hard to achieve this through continual feedback and reassurance about their abilities. One camera, not to mention three, has a tendency to detract from this trusting dynamic. Even when students forget that the cameras are present, I still remain very much aware and anxious as 'the producer' that cameras are in working order and that the cards and batteries have not run out. It can be distracting and difficult to be present to the real task at hand, which requires me to really listen to the students and hear what they are saying.

I have turned off the camera during validation meetings when content has proved sensitive. During these times, an absolutely lovely energy existed where people felt safe enough to be upset, trusting that they were not being foolish. I could never include footage of this highly sensitive nature in my

study because to do so might expose the students. I too would be a living contradiction because it could create insecurity for the students in future meetings. Such was the bond created in some validation groups I am sure students would be more than willing to assist were I to ask for permission to include such footage to help me with my study. In these cases I have used text instead of video footage in order to respect and safeguard all involved. The life-affirming energy captured later when the students are interacting and laughing is more poignant as a result of the trust built from these earlier off-camera episodes.

With the constraints of university timetables, to locate an unoccupied classroom for the length of time required to set up the room before the students' arrival is another obstacle. If recording on a regular basis, it can be complicated to locate the flat room required to film properly. Otherwise, the stepped seating in a raised room restricts easy access to the cameras, especially when filming on my own. It is difficult to move around the fixed seats to check on the camera angles after they have been set.

Towards the end of my study, it became somewhat easier to record good footage. The introduction of known camera people to the group eased frustration on my part and introduced the whole concept of the presence of cameras in an acceptable non-threatening manner. I asked students who were taking the video option in their thesis to record their fellow classmates presenting their dissertation ideas and to record me giving them feedback. This enabled the video students' to learn on the job camerawork that would help them with their future solo efforts. However, it was a learning experience and with any learning experience there can be literally shaky starts. At times, the true dynamic of the interaction was lost because evidence showed later that the camera was somewhere other than where it should have been.

It was interesting to note that students who had not chosen the video module were initially disgruntled until they learned that their colleagues were doing this exercise as a way to learn how to operate the camera. This changed the dynamic and instead they were more than happy to help instead of creating a barrier to their peers' learning. Good communication averted further discontentment with any filming process. Collegial support grew strong through these activities. In later validation meetings with my second-year dissertation students, I brought back students who had finished their studies the previous year to do the filming. This worked well as these camera people had allowed their research work be seen by the then first-year students at their final

validation the previous May. Familiarity with these post-graduates was key to a successful non-threatening session. A system was now in place that could only have unfolded through the duration of this study. It had been very frustrating for me throughout the initial reflection cycles.

A Rigorous Process

I am aware that there has been much discourse around the quality of research and how it can be assessed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). However, I would challenge those who suggest that the LET methodological approach is not a rigorous process. Throughout my inquiry, at various intervals, I regretted having chosen the approach because of the continual draw on my energy. The reflection cycles demonstrate the tensions I experienced for some of my study. The reflexivity required is demanding and the continual questioning of whether what you are doing is helping you to remain true to your values and whether your methods of teaching are in direct conflict to what you hold dear is also a particularly difficult aspect of this methodological approach. You are the 'insider researcher' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) and there is no escaping your espoused values because you have held them up as 'living standards of judgment' (Laidlaw, 1996) and now hold yourself accountable for adhering to them (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.11). However, because my values are an integral part of my ontological being and living them is a very worthwhile way to live my professional life, any regrets about my methodological choice have been transient because of the life-affirming energy continually afforded to me as I continue to improve my practice.

In choosing this approach, I have developed my own living standards of judgment that act as criteria of my practice-based research. I have also used Winter's (1989) criteria of rigour.

To demonstrate how I adhere to my value of creativity, I have produced an enhanced visual narrative to explain Winter's criteria of rigour. This can be seen in the dissertation journey in the epistemology section of my thesis. It is not enough for me just to write about it as this would mean negating my value of excellence in my role as a lecturer and would be unfulfilling as far as enhancing my practice creatively. In the Video 4.4 I am seen having a conversation on Skype with a MEME student, Mary O'Toole who is in the process of completing her thesis. Later, I revisit the raw footage to show examples of the various aspects of Winter's criteria of rigour evident from our online meeting. Coupled with demonstrating my value for creativity, the video also embodies the value I place on care and excellence as I strive to break down the key concepts into simple manageable chunks to allow for a better understanding of the content. My use of video extends

Winter's criteria to a greater audience, in keeping with my value of inclusion. The intention is that my students will get a more comprehensive appreciation of the criteria being applied to the living educational theory methodology. They might subsequently see it as a viable methodological option and consider adopting it for use in their own research inquiries.
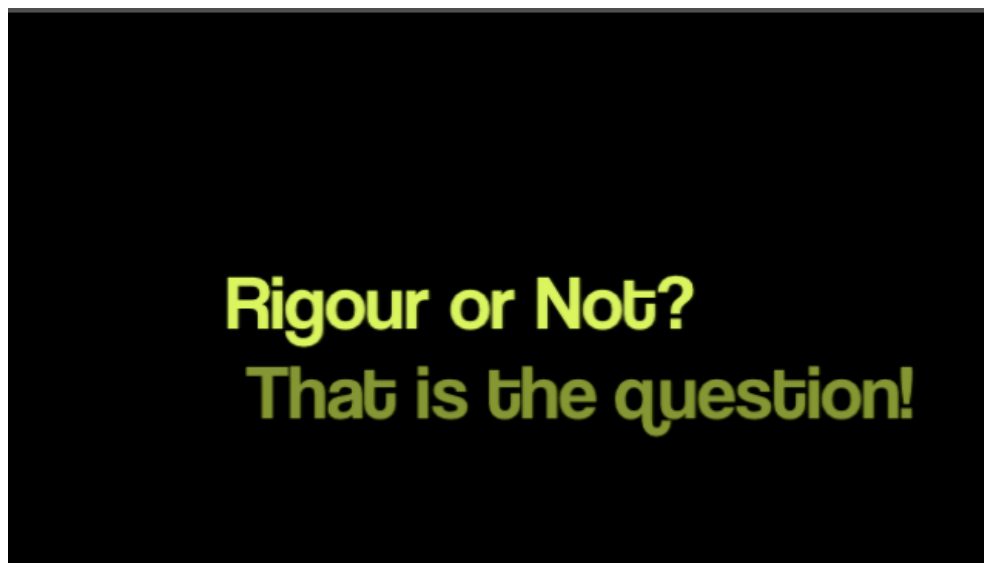
Video 4.4. Rigour or Not? That is the question (Crotty, 2012)

If this video is not successful in communicating Winter's criteria of rigour, then I have not honoured my values. However the cyclical reflection process ensures rigour as it calls for me to be reflective, invite feedback and hence improve my practice (in this case the video). I will continue until I have completed what I am proud to stand over as a quality resource that achieves its aim. Furthermore, the process itself has allowed me to be inclusive of others as I subjected my research to their scrutiny. I will now explain how I am applying Winter's six principles for enhancing the rigour of my action research account. These include dialectics, reflexive critique, risk, plural structure, multiple resource and theory practice transformation.

Winter's Six Criteria of Rigour

1. Reflexive Critique

I am part of the data through exploring my own practice with the intention of improving what I am doing. During the reflexive critique process, it is not enough to reflect on my practice in isolation from my values and assumptions. I need to make explicit the explanations for why I do what I do. For example, I value safety therefore it is necessary for me to draw on the meanings of why this value is important to me and show the evidence of this value in my practice. This is the

communication of my ontological values and transforming them into communicable standards of judgement.

2. Dialectics

Dialectics has contradiction at its core. Dialectics starts with this sense of conflict and the influences at work in creating the contradiction. A dialectical critique begins by challenging the reasons why my values of creativity, security and excellence are being negated in my place of work. Presented with the difference, I then confront the contradictions and try to rectify them. I explain why I am experiencing some of these contradictions and show how the tensions have been transformed into a harmonious state. For example entrepreneurship is associated with business. With an educational entrepreneurial spirit, I recognise from talking to my colleagues in education departments in universities worldwide, that educators are being passed over as not having the skills required to impact economically on the wider community.

3. Risk

In undertaking a research inquiry, the risk comes when I decide that I want to do something about the contradictions that exist in my practice. There is a risk that I am exposing myself to being rejected for my educational assertions, which may not be in line with the thinking of the Academy. Schön highlights this risk in his writings:

> People tend to feel the dilemma of rigour or relevance with particular intensity when they reach the age of about 45. At this point they ask themselves, Am I going to do the thing I was trained for, on which I base my claims to technical rigour and academic respectability? Or am I going to work on the problems – ill-formed, vague and messy – that I have discovered to be real around here? And depending on how people make this choice, their lives unfold differently (Schön, 1995, p.28).

There is also a risk that I cannot sustain the level of care that is needed to bring students to a standard of excellence that I claim to have in my teaching work. However, I can only do my best because I am not claiming that they will all reach excellence. I do assert that my claim to excellence is about putting the structures in place to help them to carry out the best research possible for them at the time in question.

4. Plural structure

Text has been accepted as the dominant medium to present research. The tension arises for me because I see this dominant paradigm valuing text above all other formats. And yet an inconsistency seems to exist at times when text is not the best format to demonstrate what is

happening at grass roots level. Recently this was the case in a strategy meeting to secure further funding for a careers research project. The focus of the meeting was to inform the President of Dublin City University on the progress of the *'Guiding The Way Forward'* project to date. This was a project I was developing in collaboration with Citibank and DCU. His intention was to give a progress report to the investors on a forthcoming visit to the US. His suggestion to create a three-minute video (Video 4.5) to capture the essence of our project and show evidence of its success was a most welcome one. It highlighted the need for plurality through the different forms of representation.

Video 4.5. Guiding the Way Forward (Crotty, 2012)

My use of the multi-media composition allows the wider community to engage in the research. I agree wholeheartedly with Yen Yen Joyceln Woo (2009) who writes:

> We cannot impose upon an audience forms and languages that they are not fully equipped to evaluate and then wonder why the work is not sufficiently appreciated. We need to take pains to make our subject comprehensible under the norms of the community that we wish to communicate with, then work to introduce the new, unfamiliar, or subversive. (p.36)

In engaging with LET, I realise that plurality is at its heart because in representing my educational research I will be drawing on different media to represent 'empathetic resonance'. Different influences require different forms of representation thus the use of a plural structure within my study.

Eisner (1993) explained the need to extend the forms of representation in our understandings of educational research. He advocates the use of the creative arts as evidence in research. In keeping

with his thinking, my research includes email correspondence, online journals, online forum dialogues, blogs, audio, podcasts, vodcasts, enhanced visual narratives and ebooks. These are all data collection methods and part of the plurality used within my inquiry.

5. Collaboration

> Those who wish to take the path of collaborative research be warned: this is no easy way forward. There will be doubt and mistrust, there will be disagreement and conflict, and there will be failures as well as success. For the birth of an integrated consciousness means the death of the old. It means learning to trust the wisdom of the unknown other.
>
> (Reason, 1994, p.56)

This emphasises the importance of trust in creating a collaborative environment. I recognise that people only feel safe enough to learn, share ideas and give constructive criticism in an environment that they know to be trustworthy. My students hail from various workplace practices and are also co-researchers in my inquiry. Throughout the production of my various enhanced visual narratives, my voice, my students' voices, my critical friend and my supervisor are to be heard. In addition, I incorporate the views of others from literature to give me guidance in finding a better way forward and improve my practice. It is this collaborative process that has made my research journey more enjoyable. I am a social being and my ontological perspective dictates that I work best in collaboration with others. It allows a two-way flow of life-affirming energy that co-creates a more trusting equal educational space.

6. Theory, Practice, Transformation

According to Winter's theory, practice, transformation 'do not confront one another but are necessary to each other for continued vitality and development as questions are asked and contradictions confronted in unending transformations' (Winter, 1989, p.67). We are always in transition, and within a living theory approach it is important to demonstrate how this is happening. I am involved in the research process and will make explicit the theories that inform my practice and, in turn, further analyse my practice, in a transformative cycle of theory and practice.

Figure 4.6. My Data Collection Methods

Data Collection Techniques: My Data to Reveal the Evidence

I gather data systematically to generate evidence to support my claims of bringing creativity and entrepreneurial approaches combined with multimedia forms of representation into the Academy (Figure 4.6). The data also documents my values of care excellence and empathy. I have collected data using various technological sources: email correspondences, Moodle forums, audio, video and Skype recordings of live conversations, photos and enhanced visual narratives and educational infographics. Over the duration of the study, the data reveals the development in my learning and how my improved learning and practice has influenced the learning and actions of others in my care. In keeping with my values, I engage a variety of data collection methods creatively to strengthen my claims to new knowledge. The educational infographic (Figure 4.6) gives an overview of the data collection methods I use throughout this study but also is evidence of

a data collection method in itself. It is a visual that provides evidence of my innovation and creativity. In more detail, these are the functions of all the data collection methods I have used:

Research Journal

Throughout the research process, I have kept a learning journal and documented observations from face-to-face sessions and online sessions. Moon (1999) believes a journal to be a 'friend that is always there and is always a comfort' (p.14.5). At times, it felt it was quite the opposite because of the commitment required by me to document my thoughts after class and validation meetings. I wrote immediately in the learning journal during the study to document my true feelings at that time. My students also documented their learning through the use of online learning journals and blogs.

Figure 4.7. Sinead Murphy Blog entry as part programme assignment work

This process provided me with an opportunity to respond to their entries on an ongoing basis giving me another data collection method to support my claims.

Discussion Forums

I use moodle to complement my traditional classroom teaching. Moodle is an online learning environment or a course management tool. It was originally an acronym for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. This blended approach has provided me with an opportunity to give feedback through the forums and also the feedback section in the journals. These forums allowed me to collaborate with my students as I gave them advice and guidance on how best to approach any problem that may have presented itself. From these forums I have collated evidence to back up my claims.

Video

Video has been a vital source of data collection for me, both as 'fly on the wall' documentary evidence to support my claims and as enhanced visual narrative productions that embodied my values and endeavoured to enlighten students' understanding of course content. The latter encapsulates evidence of my embodied learning during this inquiry and at times also documents the students' learning. The video also captures the relational dynamic of the interactions over time with my students.

Skype Sessions

Over the course of this inquiry, I have met with my students using Skype, which is a form of CMC (Computer Mediated Communication). Skype can be downloaded to use on a phone, computer or Skype-enabled televisions. It allows the use of video, instant messaging and audio calls and users can converse with each other regardless of their location once they have an internet connection. I have recorded the feedback sessions with students via Skype using 'Screenflow', a screen capturing software package. It records what is happening on screen and exports it as a movie file that I upload for my students' benefit. The following video is an example of how I have recorded a skype conversation with one of my students and then later produced an enhanced educational narrative to create a resource around explanatory principles for future students. It also shows my own values of passion, care, excellence and creativity.

Video 4.6. Explanatory Principles (Crotty, 2012)

Website

I have developed a website www.yvonnecrotty.com that documents evidence of ongoing research work with my students. I have linked this to the website www.diverseireland.com, which I designed for the international conference Developing Innovative Visual Educational Resources for Students Everywhere. (DIVERSE). It is also documents evidence of the international significance to my research.
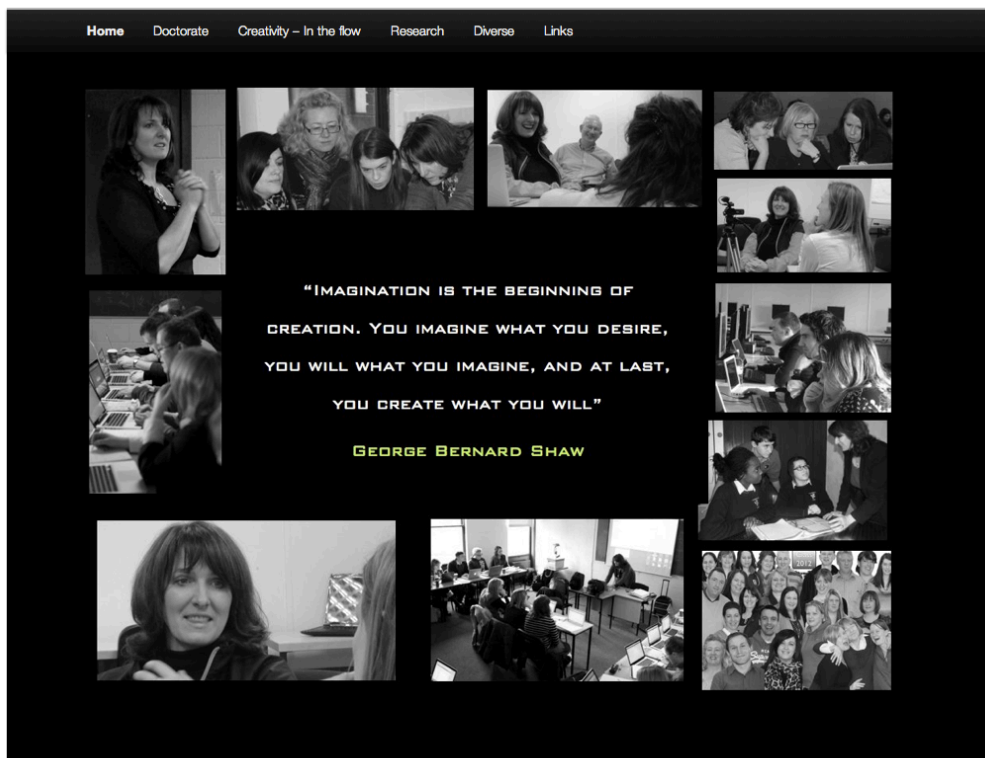

Figure 4.8. Screenshot of www.yvonnecrotty.com

The Importance of Having Valid Research

I will subject my research to the scrutiny of others to ensure that my claims of bringing creativity and multi-media forms of representation into higher education can stand up to criticism.

> ... for inter-subjective testing is merely a very important aspect of the more general idea of inter-subjective criticism or, in other words, of the idea of mutual rational control by critical discussion. (Popper, 1975, p.44).

As a method of establishing social validity, I employ Habermas' (1976) four criteria of Comprehensibility, Truth, Appropriateness and Authenticity (cited in McNiff and Whitehead, 2009) to attain the objectivity required for my research inquiry.

1. Comprehensibility

As others look at my account, they are invited to express their thoughts around the clarity of my research. Can they see if the writings and visual narratives can be made more intelligible? Can they understand the focus of my research or is it incomprehensible? Do these visuals illuminate my work or do they detract from the writing? My research offerings need to add to the knowledge base. If they cannot be understood, they are not helping to improve the learning of others or the social formations around me.

2. Truthfulness

Are my claims holding true? Is there sufficient evidence to justify my claims to be creative, caring and passionate for excellence in teaching and learning? Can I provide more evidence to back up my claims to new knowledge? Can my evidence base be strengthened? When I am editing the videos, are they a true reflection of my research or are they edited to show only what I want others to see? Do the educational infographics I have produced for this thesis show that I am being true to my value of creativity?

3. Appropriateness

Is my research right and appropriate for the time? Am I including 'an awareness of the normative assumptions I am making in the values that inform my claims to new knowledge' (Whitehead, 2011, p.184)?

In 2012 the European Commission's Enterprise and Industry Directorate General issued a 'Call for Proposals' on Entrepreneurship Education with a focus on practice-based methods. In my own

doctoral thesis I am using practice-based methods which include different forms of media. It involves students in project work and/or in activities outside the lecture hall that link them to the business world or with the local community.

My research also attempts to develop educational strategies that produce excellence on both a national and international platform, as promoted by the HEA Landscape report in 2012. My research is applied and impacts on improving the needs of our society by 'developing a workforce with a high level of skills'. In recent years, with the explosion of YouTube and social media use, my innovative methodological choices and research have become more relevant and appropriate.

4. Authenticity

If over the course of this thesis I claim to employ narrative as a method to illuminate my living educational theory, and then proceed to disengage the reader with sterile descriptive passages that seek solely to explain terminology, without reference to my experiences or my story, then my claims fall short. Credibility or believability of the study can be claimed only if the commitment of my espoused values can be seen explicitly in the long term. Only through interaction and time will others be able to judge the authenticity of my account. I claim to hold creativity, safety and care as some of my values but if my students fail to see evidence of these values at play, then I am a living contradiction and clearly lack authenticity and falsely hold these values as true. During the four-year period of this study, my nomination for President's award for excellence in teaching and learning has been a source of great joy for me. It has helped to acknowledge the authenticity of my work.

Ethics

Marion Dadds (1998) statement sums up my commitment to practitioner research:

> At the heart of every practitioner research project there is a significant job of work to be done that will make a small contribution to the improvement of the human condition in that context. Good practitioner research, I believe, helps to develop life for others in caring, equitable, humanising ways ' (p.5).

In keeping with the principle of informed consent, written consent was sought from students to take part in the research. Permission was also sought to publish students' work for the purpose of educational research. Students' permission was given to include video recordings and their feedback in the research account. The students who appear in this research were all acknowledged for their contributions.

I will now address the ethical guidelines for practitioner research. In their paper 'Ethics in practitioner research: an issue of quality', Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007, pp. 205-206) set out the following ethical guidelines for practitioner research. They link the guidelines to traditional ideas of research ethics, while they state that others come from the discourse of the 'ethical professional':

1. Observe ethical protocols and processes

The research should seek informed consent from the participants and the researcher should do no harm.

2. Transparent

The process of practitioner research should be carried out in a transparent way. The whole aim of practitioner research is in the building of community and the sharing of knowledge and ideas (p.7). As a practitioner researcher, it is important to show how one is accounting for one's practice in asking, researching and answering the question 'How do I improve my practice' (Whitehead, 1989).

3. Collaborative in Nature

A focus on collaboration is integral to practitioner research as it involves the sharing of practice with the aim of bringing about improvement. The validation meetings are opportunities for the community of practitioner-researchers to discuss their research and provide evidence.

4. Transformative

The research leads to a transformation in one's own practice and in the wider social formations: 'Responsible and ethical practitioner research operates in such a way as to create actionable, actioned outcomes' (p.8).

5. Justify itself to the community of practice

There must be a benefit to the wider community if researchers are going to invest time and energy and the final product should be of use to the wider community. There must also be a recognition that research requires time, effort and investment. As Shulman (2004) says, scholarship is only a scholarship when we make our knowledge public to a community and share it with others in the community.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored action research as an approach to research. I have outlined my rationale for choosing the LET methodology and how its philosophical assumptions are a welcome extension of my own philosophical musings during my undergraduate studies. I have explained my methodological inventiveness and how it has allowed me the opportunity to use creative methods to adhere to my value of creativity and allow my educational entrepreneurial spirit to flourish. I have given an overview of Living Educational Theory methodology and the data collection methods I have used. I have also addressed my personal and social validation journey in creating my own living theory. The creation and integration of visuals into this chapter has enabled me to clarify my living theory and has made the whole process a very worthwhile and enjoyable one.

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