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Educational Journal of Living Theories

Book review: Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2017). (Ed.) *Conferences as Sites of Learning and Development: Using Participatory Action Learning and Action Research Approaches.* Abingdon: Routledge.

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This book is organised in four Parts: The Action Learning and Action Research Association (ALARA); The Learning conference; Applications and case studies; Reflections on ALARA and its learning conferences.

The reason I am reviewing this book in EJOLTS is for the same reason that I reviewed the Taylor and Luitel's book on Transformative Learning. It is to encourage Living Theory researchers to engage in educational conversations with the contributors to the book. I am thinking of engagements in which, as Living Theory researchers, we draw insights from the contributors into our own learning and share ideas from our living-educational-theories in ways that can enhance each others' understandings of Living Theory research as a global social movement with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. My reason for being so hopeful about such educational conversations can be appreciated by the final insight in the book:

"I have argued that we need to shift away from the mindset of neoliberalism and reductionism dominating our present society and driving its obsession with consumerism, power and control. Instead we need a collaborative, participative and inclusive paradigm built on love and working through local and global action to connect us with each other as human beings and with nature. Society needs to be renewed by making a shift from the negative energy of fear, competition, control and war to the positive energy of faith, love, hope and creativity. Clearly, we need to conceptualize and practice not just learning conferences but Loving Learning Conferences." (Zuber-Skerritt, 2017, p. 224)

I understand the importance of 'conceptualisation'. However, I believe it important in sharing our living-theories in educational conversations, to go beyond conceptualizations in contributing to the renewal of society by making a shift from the negative energy of fear, competition, control and war to the positive enquiry of faith, love, hope and creativity. What I have in mind are the sharing of our living-theories in which we hold ourselves and each other to account in living our unique constellations of values as fully as possible. I hope that I am being clear about this difference between explaining the educational influences in learning of our embodied expressions of our constellations of values, and conceptualization. I understand what it means to have a concept as the ability to grasp a principle and the ability to use shared meanings of words. I value conceptualisation in the sense of sharing principles and the shared meanings of words. I believe that we all use such conceptualisations in the generation of our living-educational-theories. However, our living-theories go beyond conceptualisations in holding ourselves accountable in our explanations of educational influences in learning to living our embodied expressions of the meanings of our values, such as faith, love, hope, creativity, compassion and justice as fully as possible.

In urging Living Theory researchers to engage in educational conversations with contributors to this book I believe that we all have something significant to learn about the Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA) and about conferences as sites of learning and development.

In Part 1 there are informative contributions from Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Ron Passfield, Lesley Wood and Bob Dick on ALARA and on action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world.

Part 2 is focused on The Learning Conference with contributions from Ina Louw, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Richard Bawden, Melanie Williams, Robyn Lynn, Michelle Redman-MacLaren and Pip Bruce Ferguson. Pip Bruce Ferguson explains how to facilitate cross-cultural understanding via ALARA conferences.

Part 3 is focused on Applications and Case Studies with contributions from Shankar Sankaran, Colin Bradley, Cathy Sharp, Belinda Dewar, Judith Kearney, Richard Teare and Ortrun Zuber Skerritt.

Part 4 is focused on ALARA and its learning conferences with contributions from Ron Passfield and Associates, Gina Blackberry, Lesley Wood, Joseph Shosh and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. Lesley Wood asks if we are practising what we preach with critical reflections on the values of the ALARA World Congress 2015 for sustainable learning and development, and Joe Shosh looks towards the future of action learning and action research through global network collaboration.

Each of the contributions focuses on learning and on ALARA conferences as sites of learning and development. This is the great strength of the book. I am suggesting that Living Theory researchers could benefit from this focus on learning by strengthening the evidence-base of their explanations of influences in learning. Where I think that the contributors might learn something of value in educational conversations with Living Theory researchers is from our focus on educational learning. Our stress on educational learning in our explanations of educational influences in learning comes from the recognition that not all learning is educational.

History is full of examples of people, groups and nations learning how to inflict great pain, damage and death on others. This is why I am urging Living Theory researchers to engage in educational conversations with the contributors and to focus on:

“Society needs to be renewed by making a shift from the negative energy of fear, competition, control and war to the positive energy of faith, love, hope and creativity. Clearly, we need to conceptualize and practice not just learning conferences but Loving Learning Conferences.”

I have suggested that we Living Theory researchers engage with the contributors in educational conversations. I am thinking of educational conversations that are focused on sharing insights on how we are living our unique constellations of values, that may include, faith, love, hope and creativity, in our explanations of educational influences in learning, with the values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

Typically, action research is undertaken in a school setting. It is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the "research." Often, action research is a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Contributions to the body of knowledge about teaching and learning may also result. Development of priorities for school-wide planning and assessment efforts arise from inquiry with potential to motivate change for improvement's sake. Reflect on own practice Opportunities for teachers to evaluate themselves in schools are often few, and usually happen only in an informal manner. Action research has become a significant methodology for intervention, development and change within groups and communities. It is promoted and implemented by many international development agencies and university programs, as well as local community organizations around the world, such as AERA and Claremont Lincoln in America,[10][11] CARN in the United Kingdom,[12] CCAR in Sweden,[13] CLAYSS in Argentina,[14] and CARPED and PRIA in India.[15][16]. Journal[edit]. Participatory Action Research for Educational Leadership: Using Data-Driven Decision Making to Improve Schools. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007. ISBN 978-1-4129-3777-1. Zuber-Skerritt, O., & Wood, L. (2019). Action Learning and Action Research: Genres and Approaches" Emerald (UK).