Theory, theorising and pedagogies of change in an era of (theory) austerity:

Some themes and issues regarding doctoral researchers’ identities and practices

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The project:
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I was interested to know more about practitioner researchers’ engagements with ‘theory’ in its broadest sense:

*How to find time to do the study?*

*How to find time to think?*

*What to think about?*

*Where does theory come from in relation to our research topics?*

*Why does this matter?*
The respondents:

- UK and overseas
- EdD and PhD
- Graduate students and postdocs.
- Lecturers (HE) and teachers (statutory schooling, early childhood education)
- Diverse professional fields and disciplinary areas
The data:
Distinct theme of ‘transmigrations’ (Perselli, ibid.)
of discipline / theory/ location

- **Education** + **Engineering** /Jamison [Denmark]
- **Theatre** + **Business studies** [UK]
- **Academic development** + **Visual arts** /Foucault [UK]
- **Physiotherapy** + **Education** /Judith Butler [UK]
- **Early childhood education** + Te Whariki /Barbara Rogoff [New Zealand/UK]
- **Foundations of education** + **Foucault** [USA]
- **Women in academia** + Luz Irigaray [Malta]
- **Autobiography** + **Bricolage** [China/N. America]
- **English in Education** + **Policy sociology** /Stephen Ball [UK]
The analysis:

1) A ‘diversity of domains’ (Perselli, ibid.) held in (pedagogic) tension with each other

- Curricular, disciplinary or professional knowledge [from participants] + educational (or other) theories and practices [of self],

or alternatively

- Educational knowledge and practice [from self] + new theoretical premise/methodology [to participants]
2) Via theory and method ‘creatively conjoined’ (Perselli, ibid.):

**Poststructural:**  
- e.g. Irigaray, Foucault, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha  
(broadly deconstructive methods)

**Structural:**  
- e.g. Vygotsky, Freire, Stephen Ball, Steinberg  
(broadly social constructionist methods)

**Post-positivist underpinning:**  
- Truth is not ‘out there’ to be discovered;  
- Truths are predominantly tentative, provisional and contestable
3) Using the familiar tropes of the doctorate:

• Journey
• Transition
• Gateway
• Threshold
• Change
• Transformation
4) But highly differentiated and problematised:

‘The moment doors are open, a practice becomes amenable to commodification’ (Camillieri 2009 p.32) ‘when a new technique is discovered, it is only a question of time before it is incorporated within the ideological circle of educational institutions, publishing industries and funding agencies. The challenge is to find a way of working within the institution that acknowledges the esoteric dimension of exoteric practice’ (ibid. p.34). (A. Bailley in Perselli, ibid.)

‘The other term for culture in the Chinese language is hua. The most important connotation of this word is to change, and to be more accurate, to transform. Hua always comes in the form of jiao hua. Jiao means to teach, to persuade, and the term jiao hua has three layers of implications’ (X. Lu, in Perselli, ibid.)
5) Contextualised within a counter-discourse to neoliberalism and consumerism

- Theory ‘put to work’ (Lather)
- Theory defined, differentiated, transported, problematised
- Dialogic, non-exclusive and non-hierarchical approach
- Non-parochial, outward looking, forward thinking, participatory (‘third space’)

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Conclusion and evaluation:

1) ‘Pedagogies of change’ (Perselli, ibid.) through situated (above) and moderated (research process) recognition (over time) of self, other, I/thou relationship, wider society

- **Educative relations** (Lomax; Gitlin): self - participants; presenter - audience; writer - readership
- **Reciprocity** (‘resourceful peers’ in Perselli & Moehrke-Rasul, 2013): what is *brought to the study* by its protagonist /participants /reviewers (e.g. ourselves, today)?
- Cultural and social contribution to ‘the greater good’ i.e. not the solipsistic self
- **Illuminative** and therefore with *emancipatory potential* i.e. theory neither obfuscated nor confined to the academy (exclusivity); neither simplified nor over-claiming (commodification)
- Transformations -either retrospective or deferred - through transmigration in naturalistic settings.
2) Notwithstanding the issue of representation:

• The doctoral text is a representation of the project, not ‘the thing itself’

• The ‘thing itself’ cannot be known; project (and teaching act) is transient, elusive and possibly enigmatic (‘reserved knowledge(s)’?)

• All texts may be deconstructed; but doctoral texts demand high levels of educational literacy in order to do this

• Which requires time and necessitates the creation of a conducive learning environment.
3) ‘So why is my study important?’ [Candidate, participants]

4) ‘Who cares anyway?’ [Examiner, wider audiences]

- The doctoral text/project can facilitate higher levels of educational literacy, expanding our vocabularies and lexicons of practice/theory/method

- Creative readings (e.g. project/thesis as a ‘prismatic’ cultural artifact) can generate multiple new ways of doing and making, *thinking, feeling and being*...
Bibliography


