

Review Of Bernie Sullivan's Doctoral Thesis, A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality

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Bernie Sullivan's doctorate was awarded by the University of Limerick in 2007. In her Abstract, Bernie explains that her living-theory of social justice evolved through undertaking research with educational provision for Traveller children. Bernie explains how her embodied values of social justice and equality compelled her to engage in social and educational practices that refused to privilege some children at the expense of minority or marginalised groups. In her living-theory Bernie explains how she transformed these values into the living, critical standards of judgement by which she wishes her work to be evaluated. I believe that this process of transformation will be of interest to all Living Theory researchers. At some point in our Living Theory enquiries, if we would like our embodied knowledge to be recognised by others, we need to clarify the values we express in giving meaning and purpose to our lives. We also need to do what Bernie has done and show how expressions of our embodied values can be clarified as explanatory principles, in the course of their emergence in practice, and used as the living standards of judgement to evaluate the validity of the contribution to educational knowledge.

Bernie explains how she used a self-study approach, within an action research methodology to both improve her practice and generate her living-theory as a form of emancipatory education. In doing this Bernie shows how her living-theory goes beyond traditional propositional theories of justice as it evolved from her lived reality of social practices in an educational institution.

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Bernie also explains how she arrived at an understanding that a practice of inclusion is more appropriate for a living theory of justice than one of assimilation, which, as she says, often seeks to deny difference, or integration, which frequently attempts to eliminate difference.

A practice of inclusion that is grounded in an intercultural ethos may take account of individual differences and transcend normative institutional hegemonic structures and discourses that are grounded in a logic of domination.

Through developing my living theory of social justice as equality of respect for all, and as the recognition and acceptance of diversity, I became aware of the possibility that a process of inclusion could have a greater probability of success in achieving sustainable social evolution if it originated from the marginalised space. In this context, my research could have significance for other marginalised groups, as well as for the Traveller children in whose interests the research was undertaken.

Whilst celebrating and recognizing what Bernie Sullivan achieved in her doctoral thesis as an original contribution to knowledge, this review is also celebrating what Bernie has accomplished over the past decade, with her colleagues, including Caitriona McDonagh, Mary Roche, Mairin Glenn and Pip Bruce Ferguson in the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI). You can access more details on Bernie's post-doctoral living-theory research at

<http://www.eari.ie/>



Video 1: Bernie Sullivan introducing her thesis.

<https://youtu.be/ufElqS1WmbM>

References

de Sousa Santos, B, (2014) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London; Paradigm Publishers.

Sullivan, B. (2006) *A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality*. Retrieved 30 May 2017 from <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=47>