

Sustaining and Thriving Transformative Living Educational Theory Research and Practice in Challenging Times and Contexts

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Abstract

Our intention here is to contribute to envisioning and realising a paradigm shift for empowering the future of research and education to bring into being a more harmonious, peaceful world where individuals and communities can learn to flourish and help others do so too. Humans have faced challenges from time immemorial. Some challenges are common; others are particular to a time and context. Challenges particular to a 21st century world include those presented by: a global pandemic, climate change and, the hegemony of technical rationality and global spread of individualistic, populist and neoliberal ideologies. This presents us each with a personal challenge to accept responsibility to pose, create and offer valid answers to questions such as, ‘How can I, as a researcher, practitioner and citizen, contribute to the development of local, national and global policies and practices which hold a hope of bringing into being a world with values of human flourishing, and help others do so too?’ We illustrate how practitioners worldwide have been engaging for decades in Living Educational Theory Research to generate answers to such questions. In the process they have critically and creatively engaged with various knowledges and united with researchers, practitioners and citizens across multiple academic fields and disciplines to: improve their research and pedagogical practices for the benefit of all; transform education and research to enhance sustainable educational, values-led, development of individuals and communities locally and globally and; contribute valid accounts of the knowledge they generate to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase.

Keywords: Transformative Practice; Values of Human Flourishing; Professional Development; Living Educational Theory Research.

Background

Questions, such as, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ gave rise to the development of Living Educational Theory Research (Whitehead, 1989) as a distinct form of professional practitioner educational research. In the course of Living Educational Theory Research practitioners clarify the relationally dynamic values of human flourishing they use to explain and evaluate their practice. The development arose from stipulating a necessary condition of Living Educational Theory Research as the generation by a practitioner, of a valid explanation of their educational, values-laden, influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. There is no necessity to generate these explanations within Action Research, Auto-ethnographical Research, Narrative Inquiry or any other form of practitioner research.

Purpose

To contribute to:

- Co-joint envisioning and realisation of a paradigm shift in moving, from the hegemony of technical rationality, for empowering the future of research and education, to bring into being a more harmonious, peaceful world where individuals and communities can learn to flourish and help others do so too.
- Expanding awareness of situatedness and creating harmonious spaces by strengthening and enlarging international communities of transformative practitioners with values of human flourishing.
- Promoting responsibility, equity, empowerment and enhanced meaningfulness in educational research and practice.
- Cultivating a vision of greater openness.

Literature

We draw insights from diverse knowledges, for example:

- MacIntyre's (1988, p. 403) claims about the vindication of rival claims to truth, rationality, knowledge and power;
- Foucault's (Rabinow, 1991, p. 55) distinction between battles on behalf of 'truth' and the rules that determine what counts as truth;
- Santos' (2016) awareness of the dangers of the colonising influences of epistemologies in what he calls 'epistemicide', and;
- Jakubik's (2022) analysis of 'The Role of Higher Education in Solving Global Problems', with her assertion that the world's global problems need urgent and sustainable solutions and actions in seeking to create answers to questions such as, 'How can higher education develop authentic and responsible citizens who will be able to act and solve global problems?'

We draw on insights such as these, to improve our contribution to envisioning and realising a paradigm shift in educational research and empower the future of research and education to bring into being a more harmonious, peaceful world where individuals and communities can learn to flourish and help others do so too.

We also draw on:

Living Educational Theory Doctorates legitimated by Universities worldwide (access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>) such as:

- Whitehead (1999), *How do I Improve my Practice? Creating a Discipline of Education Through Educational Enquiry*
- Charles (2007), *How Can I Bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard of Judgement Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition.*
- Huxtable (2012), *How do I Evolve Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries?*
- Qutoshi (2016), *Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education in Pakistan.*

Published, peer-reviewed papers such as:

- Boland and Romero's (2017), *(Re)inhabiting Waldorf Education: Honolulu Teachers Explore the Notion of Place*
- Gumede and Mellett's, (2019), *Forming a 'We' through a good-quality conversation*
- Rahman, Lund, Alamin, Khalid, Krogh's, (2021), *Developing a transformative, cooperative living-educational-theory with children and youth in the EDS (Education for Development and Sustainability) community of practice in Bangladesh.*

- Whitehead and Huxtable's, (2022) *Developing a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Community-Based Educational Research*.

Conference presentations such as:

- Dhungana's (2022), *Living educational values for enhancing harmonious equitable space*.

Reports such as:

- Rawal's (2017), *Straws in the wind: An evaluation of a teacher-training programme*.

Methodology and methods

Our methodology is that of Living Educational Theory Research, a form of professional practitioner educational research and practitioner self-study research in which the question is not 'who' am I?' but rather 'What am I doing to contribute to the realisation of values of human flourishing?' At the heart of this question is the acceptance of a responsibility to continuously strive to improve our practice in order to enhance our educational influence in our own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. Whitehead (1989) coined the term living-educational-theory for valid explanations created by practitioners for their educational influence in one's own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. The approach draws insights from diverse knowledges, such as those psychology, philosophy, sociology, leadership and management of education in order to improve knowledge and practice with values of human flourishing; values such as authenticity, integrity and those of global citizens who accept their responsibility to contribute to bringing into being a world where the humanity of individuals, communities and Humanity flourish.

In the development of a living-educational-theory methodology, methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart 2001, p.166) is stressed in asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional educational practice?'. In exercising methodological inventiveness, it is important to recognise that each Living Educational Theory Researcher generates their own living-educational-theory methodology in producing their explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. This process is very different from traditional approaches that usually involve the application of an existing methodology to a research inquiry. This generation of a living-educational-theory methodology can often include insights from other methodologies (Whitehead, 2018).

Methods developed include:

- i. Empathetic resonance with digital visual data (Whitehead, 2010; Huxtable, 2009) for clarifying and communicating the meanings of embodied values that distinguish practice as educational
- ii. The use of living-posters (Huxtable, 2019, p.12-14), to enable people to be present as individuals in communities and make connections with others working in diverse contexts and cultures, as illustrated by those accessed from the living-posters 'homepage', access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>

Living Educational Theory Researchers & other educational-practitioner researchers developing educational, values-laden knowledge, theory, practice and opportunities that contribute to systemic change for the flourishing of humanity.

Find a kindred spirit by exploring the researchers' living-posters where they give a snapshot of their sites of practice and research. Follow the links into a group page to find links to the individual's living-posters.
(Use your back-button to return to this page.)

HOW to CREATE and SHARE your LIVING-POSTER...

Contact Jack Whitehead at jack@livingtheory.org for further information

Image 1 Living-posters homepage

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>

Living-posters have also been developed to form other research methods.

iii. Creating valid multimedia accounts

As we research, we try to clarify and communicate the realisation in practice of relationally dynamic, humanitarian and life-enhancing values, which contribute to a world in which humanity can increasingly flourish and enable others and communities to engage in this research too. Words alone are often insufficient, hence the necessity of creating and publishing multimedia accounts. For examples of valid multimedia accounts of living-educational-theory research created by practitioner-researchers working in diverse social, cultural and practice contexts around the world, see the Educational Journal of Living Theories (<https://ejolts.net/>).

iv. Creation of personal websites

To make freely accessible Living Educational Theory Research websites have been created, as illustrated by Whitehead's website, <https://www.actionresearch.net>, Huxtable's, <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/> and the resource website they are developing, <http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheory>

Findings and Discussion

Our findings and discussion are related to our intention to:

- Co-create the envisioning and realisation of a paradigm shift in moving, from the hegemony of technical rationality, for empowering the future of research and education, to bring into being a more harmonious, peaceful world where individuals and communities can learn to flourish and help others do so too.
- Expanding awareness of situatedness and creating harmonious spaces by strengthening and enlarging international communities of transformative practitioners with values of human flourishing.
- Promoting responsibility, equity, empowerment and enhanced meaningfulness in educational research and practice.

- Cultivating a vision of greater openness.

Realising these intentions involves the acceptance of educational responsibility to pose, create and offer valid answers to questions such as, ‘How can I, as a researcher, practitioner and citizen, contribute to the development of local, national and global policies and practices which hold a hope of bringing into being a world with values of human flourishing, and help others do so too?’

Here we focus on the evidence-based accounts of practitioners holding themselves to account for enhancing their educational influences in the learning of individuals and communities through sustaining and thriving transformative Living Educational Theory Research and practice in challenging times in diverse cultural contexts and fields of practice. The accounts discussed here are those referred to in the literature section, The contexts include those of practitioner-researchers living and working in India, Pakistan, Nepal, South Africa and Hawaii drawing on their embodied cultural knowledges; knowledges sometimes ‘categorised’ as those created in the ‘global south’, ‘indigenous’ cultures and ‘Eastern Wisdom’.

The discussion is focused on the implications of our innovative, educational research and pedagogical practices and; scholarly narratives, about our transformative educational research and pedagogical practices in using Living Educational Theory Research to address challenging socio-political contexts. Our meaning of praxis is that of ‘living-educational-theory praxis’ (Huxtable, 2012) where praxis is understood as theory and practice held together formed and informed by the practitioner’s embodied values of human flourishing which give meaning and purpose to their practice.

This connects with our understanding of what is educational as learning with values of human flourishing. In Living Educational Theory Research, we are continuously deepening and extending our cognitive range and concerns in our understandings of global and local socio-political contexts. This is shown in each living-educational-theory that is strengthened in relation to a validation process focused on enhancing an explanation’s comprehensibility, evidence, sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and authenticity in terms of values of human flourishing.

As we offer an alternative to the hegemony of technical rationality, we use Living Educational Theory Research we accept Schön’s (1995) analysis of the need for a new epistemology for the new scholarship. Our epistemology defines the nature of the explanations we are offering.

These explanations include both what Foucault (Rabinow, 1991, p. 74) describes as a battle around truth or regimes of truth and the different battle about the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted. According to Foucault “Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statement. In contributing to a new politics of truth, from the perspective of Living Educational Theory Research, we take into account Ryle’s (1973, p. 31) point about avoiding the ‘intellectualist legend’. We do this by grounding our inquiries within practical questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve my professional practice, with values of human flourishing?’ It is important to recognise that the ‘I’ in a question of the kind, ‘How do I improve my practice?’ is a relationally dynamic ‘I’ that exists within a community of ‘we’. In our community-based educational research we recognise that values can express both real and apparent conflicts and tensions, between the needs of individual people and those of local, national and international communities. The conflicts can be acknowledged and faced, within the living boundaries of cooperative i~we relationships (e.g. Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006; Huxtable, 2012; Whitehead & Huxtable, 2022).

Interim Conclusion and Implications

Our conclusion is in the form of questions to you, the reader, as to whether we have offered you a convincing evidence and values-based analysis that:

- i. contributes to the realisation of the aims of scholars engaged in Transformative Educational Research and Sustainable Development (TERSD), which are to conceive, enact, and flourish the depth and scope of transformative capabilities, collaboration, embodied practice, and praxis in education and research.
 - ii. expands awareness of our situatedness and created a harmonious space by strengthening and enlarging an international network of transformative practitioners.
 - iii. cultivated a vision of greater openness.
 - iv. shared our innovative praxis-driven educational research and pedagogical practices in overcoming challenging socio-political contexts - scholarly narratives about our transformative educational research and pedagogical practices.
 - v. promoted equity, empowerment and enhanced meaningfulness in educational research and practice.
 - vi. Addressed epistemological tensions of inequity and injustice.
- We have explored more implications of the above ideas most recently in our paper on ‘Developing a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Community-Based Educational Research’ (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2022). Do please access this from the references section below and respond to our most recent research. We hope that you will join us in our contributions to the next steps.

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