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You and Your Living-Educational Theory

How to Conduct a Values-Based Inquiry for Human Flourishing

Jacqueline Delong and Jack Whitehead



You and Your Living-Educational Theory

Through the narratives of practitioner-researchers, this practical guide shares the proven processes, phases and supports that are most effective for generating living-educational-theories with values of human flourishing. Filled with case studies and continuing professional development activities, this book supports readers to conduct a values-based inquiry to improve their lives, describing and explaining how they influence themselves, others and the places where they live and work.

There are four parts to the book, guiding readers through the process of creating and sharing their own living-educational-theory:

- Part One is designed to meet the needs of the beginning researcher as they start a project to improve their practice.
- Part Two builds on Part One to address the deeper, more complex requirements of those interested in more academic projects potentially for accreditation at the Master's level.
- Part Three focuses on PhD/doctoral studies.
- Part Four focuses on applying this knowledge more widely to living our educational responsibilities as global citizens.

This book will serve as a useful guide, as opposed to a fixed template, to support readers in living their values more fully. It is an essential resource for all practitioners interested in establishing a Culture of Inquiry to create their own living-educational-theories. These are explanations of values-based professional development within their school community and can be submitted for academic accreditation.

Jacqueline Delong is a retired Superintendent of Education and Adjunct Professor, currently an International Mentor for Master's and doctoral students who need support for their Living Educational Theory research. You can access many of her writings from 1995 to 2023 at: http://www.actionresearch.net, http://www.spanglefish.com/ ActionResearchCanada/and https://ejolts.net/. **Jack Whitehead** is a Visiting Professor at the University of Cumbria, UK, and an Extraordinary Professor of Community-Based Educational Research at North-West University, SA. He is a former President of the British Educational Research Association. You can access many of his writings from 1967 to 2023 at: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml.

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Foreword

How this book can guide you

We are hoping that this book will serve as a guide as opposed to a template to help you in creating your own living-educational-theory. Through the narratives of practitioner-researchers, including ourselves, we share the processes, phases and supports that have worked for us and others. In addition, we have provided visual supports through YouTube and other platforms. The addresses for the video recordings (urls) are included in the text version as well as in the electronic one.

The process of living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) creation is rarely sequential (some would say, never). You may find that following the way that we have conceived this creative process fits your learning style, but you may prefer to skim the whole and come back to various points in the book. It is only limited by your own inventiveness.

While it is certainly feasible to work through the inquiry on your own, you may find it eminently more enjoyable and easier to reach completion with the help of others. This help may include a Culture of Inquiry (Delong, 2002) where a group of like-minded individuals come together in a safe, caring, democratic space to support each other as they create their living-educational-theories.

There are four parts to the book: Part One is designed to meet the needs of the beginning practitioner-researcher; Part Two builds on Part One to address the deeper, more complex requirements of those interested in more academic projects potentially for accreditation. Part Three focuses on PhD/doctoral studies. Part Four focuses on living educational responsibilities as global citizens. You may go back and forth between the four parts to meet your needs.

To get started, all you need is an inquiring mind and a commitment to improvement.



Beginning

1.1 Intent and Purpose

Part One of this book is dedicated to those practitioners who are new to Living Educational Theory research, who want to improve their practice and who want to know for sure that they are improving with evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning. It bears noting that this process is for everyone, in every age group, in any line of work and in any position: it is transformative for teachers, students and administrators, for nurses, nursing instructors and administrators, for global community developers, for parents of small children and for retired military personnel. The Living Theory space of practice has no limitation but there must be a practice, some aspect of your life, to study and improve.

We invite you to create your own-living-educational theory and take this opportunity to personalise your own learning as continuous professional development, not through someone else's agenda. This model of professional growth links research and practice and leads to substantive change. Bev McDonald, one of the early adopters in the Brant Country Board of Education, wrote that she had "grown as a professional" and

I have had the opportunity to reflect and review Literacy in the Primary Grades and to implement a very exciting literacy program in my classroom. Throughout the whole process, I have felt in complete control of all aspects, along with my two colleagues.

(Halsall & Hossack, 1996, p. 24)

The book outlines the investigative process for the beginner with specific activities and examples from our experience. Support is a critical component in the learning and growth and includes opportunities to dialogue, cultures of inquiry, critical friends, and guidance from mentors. When supports are in place, creating your own living-educational-theory:

- Focuses activities on learning and improvement
- Facilitates self and peer assessment
- Increases the sense of self-awareness, control and confidence
- Provides a different and wider lens for the practitioner and her students/colleagues
- Fosters continuous cycles of action, reflection and review
- Recognises and confirms individual ways of knowing
- Strengthens the voice of the practitioner and the student
- Creates and shares new knowledge
- Recognises different cultural experiences
- Contributes to professional dialogue and professional development
- Transforms lives and contributes to human flourishing
- Enhances sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and their influence in the researcher's practice.

The most significant experience for the novice learning to create their own living-educational-theory is finding confidence in their own 'I', recognising their embodied knowledge and exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering their question, "How do I improve what I am doing?".

In Part One, we introduce you to the process of creating your own living-educational-theory as a novice, giving you all that you need to create your first research project using the Living Theory approach to research. We take you through the steps so that you get the support you need and have confidence in your knowledge and your capacity to share it as you focus on a small and manageable part of your practice and try to improve it.

1.2 Why Should You Create Your Own-Living-Educational Theory?

We feel that it is important to differentiate between self-study and Living Theory: all Living Theories are self-studies but not all selfstudies are living-educational-theories. Living Theories are, by the nature of the question with 'I' at the centre, a study of self. However, self-studies may not involve using your values as explanatory principles in explaining your educational influences in your own learning and in the learning of your students as a contribution to the evolution of an educational knowledge base. We have been active in the field of self-study and our work has been inspired by self-study research. In fact, Jack was one of the founding members of the Self-study in Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) Special Interest Group (SIG) in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 1993. We have presented papers in S-STEP over many years, and we have written chapters in several self-study texts (Kitchen et al., 2020; Whitehead, 2009; Whitehead et al., 2020).

We recognise that there are a variety of ways in which teachers can study themselves and their practices. In Narrative Inquiry, for example, researchers use narrative to help them create meaning in what they are doing; in Autoethnography, researchers focus on the implications of cultural influences in their practice and understandings. Researchers can also focus on Action Research which can include different schools of thought such as the Critical Theory school of Action Research. This gives priority to understanding the political, economic and living cultural influences in their practice and understandings. Living Theory researchers include insights from these different approaches to improve what they are doing and in generating valid, values and evidence-based explanations of their educational influences in learning.

We believe that teachers are the decisive element in the classroom and, therefore, it is a professional responsibility of teachers to engage in this form of self-study research. They can then ensure that they are creating an energising, life-affirming educational climate where learning and learners can thrive rather than simply survive. The purpose of self-study research is not to pump up the ego of a self-serving self but to research and generate knowledge of the educational influences in learning that contribute to the knowledge base of teaching and learning.

The theories of psychologists, sociologists and others concerned with education can be useful for teachers to draw on when they try to improve their practice. However, how these theories are expressed in practice can be very different, as Ginott (1972) eloquently pointed to when he wrote:

I have come to the frightening conclusion: I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, a child humanised or dehumanised.

(p. 15 and 16)

Why should we use Living Theory research to improve our lives? We believe that what distinguishes a teacher as a professional educator is that they continuously research their practice to improve their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of their students and to contribute to the evolution of an educational knowledge base. We know that the idea of contributing to the educational knowledge base as a distinguishing characteristic of a professional in education may be contentious, but it is an assumption we make in our work in enhancing professionalism in education. We believe teachers can do this by researching their practice, integrating insights drawn from the knowledge of others, and holding themselves accountable by contributing the validated knowledge they generate to the growth of an educational knowledge base.

Michelle Vaughan (2019) describes the impact of this work in an excerpt from her June 2019 article in *EJOLTs*:

I embarked on this journey to have a better understanding of what lies at my core, yet what I have come to realize is that this journey was indeed about bringing my core to the surface and creating the space to let it flow outward with confidence and purpose. When we talk about cores, they are often hidden, as in the middle of the earth or even the center of an apple, but this work is about exposing them and bringing them to the light for examination and discussion. Once my inside was revealed, I felt the sense of wholeness described by Moira Laidlaw (1996), the fragmented pieces of things that were important to me suddenly aligning themselves to create a scene that made sense for this first time. I found I could not do this work alone, and through the mentorship I received from those within this field, I was encouraged to talk about my work, share my thinking and expose my core. While initially uncomfortable, once I started, I found that I could not stop. Like a good book, I would share my story with anyone who would listen, making new pathways for this energy to travel.

(Vaughan, 2019, p. 76)

What particularly distinguishes Living Theory research from other forms of self-study is the generation of an evidence-based explanation of educational influence in learning. The explanations include the clarification of their life-enhancing values. These are the values that give meaning and purpose to our lives, form our explanatory principles of our educational influences in learning and the standards by which we hold ourselves accountable as professional educators. We will further discuss our meaning of values later in Parts One and Two.

1.3 What Is a Living-Educational-Theory?

In this book, we will show the implications for you of adopting a research methodology that focuses you, the researcher, on creating and making public your valid values-based explanations of your educational influence in your own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations within which you live and work. Generating such explanations of educational influences in learning is what distinguishes Living Educational Theory research. This is a form of self-study, practitioner-research whereby you clarify your embodied life-affirming values as they emerge in the course of researching aspects of your practice to understand, improve and explain it. These values form the principles and standards by which you explain and evaluate your educational influences in learning. You do this while contributing to your 'field'-related practice such as health and social care, community, education and management.

In his seminal paper on Living Theory, Jack proposed that the aim of a living-educational-theory account is for the writer to make a valid claim that they understand their own educational development:

I'm assuming that all readers of this Journal will at some time have asked themselves questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?', and will have endeavoured to improve some aspect of their practice. I believe that a systematic reflection on such a process provides insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations which we would accept as valid accounts of our educational development. I claim that a living educational theory will be produced from such accounts.

(Whitehead, 1989a, p. 41)

Whitehead (2008) asserts that: "A living-educational-theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence

in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work" (p. 104). A livingeducational-theory emerges as an individual explores the implications of asking, researching and answering a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' The 'I' in such a question often experiences themselves as a 'living contradiction' in the sense that they recognise that while holding certain values, they are either negating these values in their practice or not living them as fully as they can. This tension or concern of being a living contradiction stimulates the imagination to think of possible ways of improving practice.

To begin, you will consider ways in which you might improve your practice. After you imagine new possibilities, one possibility is selected and forms the over-arching research question. The next step is to create an action plan to explore the question. You act on this plan and gather data that will enable a judgement to be made on the effectiveness of the action in living your values more fully. You then evaluate the effectiveness of the actions and modify your concerns, plans and actions in the light of the evaluations. A living-educationaltheory is produced as an explanation of your educational influences in your own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence your practice and understandings. Your living-educational-theory is shared with a validation group of some 3-8 peers that you select. They suggest ways of improving the explanation in terms of its comprehensibility, the evidence used to justify assertions made, the extent and depth of the sociocultural and sociohistorical understandings that influence the explanation and the authenticity of the explanation in terms of you living your values as fully as possible.

In generating your own living-educational-theory, it is important that you are not constrained by the imposition of any methodology such as action research, autoethnography, case study or narrative inquiry. Each individual generates their own living-educationaltheory methodology in the course of generating their own livingeducational-theory. This capacity of each individual researcher is known as their 'methodology inventiveness' (Dadds & Hart, 2001).

We have understood for years that substantive choice was fundamental to the motivation and effectiveness of practitioner research (Dadds, 1995); that what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes.

We now realise that, for some practitioners, methodological choice could be a fundamentally important aspect of the quality of their research and, by implication, the quality of the outcomes. Without the freedom to innovate beyond the range of models provided by traditional social science research or action research, the practitioners in our group may have been less effective than they ultimately were in serving the growth of professional thought, subsequent professional actions or the resolution of professional conflicts through their research. In this, we find ourselves sympathetic to Elliott's claim (1990:5) that 'One of the biggest constraints on one's development as a researcher, is the presumption that there is a right method or set of techniques for doing educational research.

(Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 166)

In generating your own living-educational-theory methodology, you can draw insights from any other methodology where those insights are appropriate, for example, in the use of an actionreflection cycle as described above and in the use of narrative as used below. In generating a living-educational-theory, it is usual to use any methods that are appropriate to researching and answering the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' Sometimes a Living Theory researcher must develop their own methods for their inquiry:

The originality of the paper lies in the use of a method for using empathetic resonance with video-data to clarify the meanings of energy-flowing values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence in learning.

(Whitehead, 2010, p. 89)

Whitehead also focuses on the importance of the flows of lifeaffirming energy with values that carry hope for human flourishing in explanations of educational influence in learning. There will be further explanation of these concepts.

1.4 What Do We Mean by Values and Living Contradiction?

1.4.1 Values

You will note that 'values' are mentioned many times in the course of discussion of Living Theory and, indeed, in this book. There may not be a common understanding of the nature of values. Values are defined as, 'principles or standards of behaviour' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2004). We are of the opinion that we understand them when we see them and as Feyerabend (1990) stated that "... values can only be clarified and understood in the course of their emergence in practice" (p. 17).

While some differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic values (Common Cause Handbook, p. 20), we do not. We intend to adhere to our values consistently whether in our personal or work lives and when we do not, we find ourselves to be 'living contradictions'. This does not preclude values from changing over time and, in fact, they often do. The Common Cause Handbook points out:

Values, then, are one important influence on our actions and the way we see the world. Understanding them reveals a major underlying connection between a vast array of major issues—racism, human rights, community welfare, women's empowerment, youth exclusion, biodiversity loss, sustainability. Concern and behaviours related to these problems are all associated with a set of related values. [71] Such an understanding also reveals an important way in which progress on these issues is influenced by education, the media, and other social institutions. Values are engaged and strengthened by our experiences—and we are all a part of each other's experience, whether we like it or not.

(p. 42)

In his writing on "conversations on educational values", Andy Larter shared the following:

A few years ago, if you had asked me what my values as a teacher were, I would probably have replied that I valued student autonomy, the teacher in the role of facilitator, learning being fun yet worthwhile, talk as an important learning process and the emphasis placed on the process rather than purely the outcome. If this strikes you as vague it is because my thinking at that time reflected my somewhat glib utterances about what I valued as a teacher. I feel that there is nothing unusual in this. During a DES course at Bath University (12/6/85) it appeared that many colleagues on the course were finding it hard to express what they felt to be their values. I feel that this is not because teachers are an unprincipled lot, but rather because much of what we do is taken for granted or implicit in our work.

(https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/cycle1.pdf, p. 8)

Your values are evident in your actions and provide a screen or decision-making tool to judge whether you have improved. Because the expression of energy in the meanings of values such as justice, democracy or "loved into learning" (Campbell, 2011) cannot be communicated using only words on pages of text, we use video-data in a visual narrative to help with the public communication, the ostensive expression, of these meanings.

1.4.2 Living Contradiction

It is usually worthwhile video recording a lesson before you design your action plan. The video recording is a most powerful reflector of what you are doing and can often reveal contradictions between what you believe yourself to be doing and what you can see yourself doing. We refer to this experience in terms of being a living contradiction. All the teachers we have worked with have reported the experience of seeing themselves as living contradictions as they recognise, often in a surprising context, that they are not living their educational values as fully as they believed.

For example, Margaret Jensen of Hardenhuish School wanted to encourage her students to read what are considered to be the best parts of Shakespeare's writings. However, with the help of video, Margaret reported the experience of seeing herself as a living contradiction as she was taking the best parts in the reading of Shakespeare. This was also confirmed in pupils' written reports. Andy Larter examined his feelings on viewing a video recording of his response on being given a racist poem. Andy wanted to encourage his students to talk about their racist poem. Videos showed that Andy's responses got in the way of this encouragement. They actually prevented the kind of exploration he wanted to have with his pupils. Erica Holley of Greendown School reported her surprise on seeing transcript evidence which showed that she, rather than her pupils, were asking the questions which Erica wanted the pupils to ask. This was a similar experience to Jack's experience of seeing himself as a living contradiction whilst watching a video of his classroom in which he believed that he had established inquiry-learning with pupils asking their own questions. Like Erica, Jack could see that he was giving his pupils the questions to ask.

It is often the experience of oneself as a living contradiction which stimulates the imagination to think of ways of overcoming this experience in a desired direction. While acting to improve your practice, it is often useful to gather data which will enable you to make a judgement on the effectiveness of your actions in terms of the pupils' learning.

We delve more deeply into 'Values' in Part Two.

1.5 What Really Matters to You in Improving Your Practice?

The Values Exercise that we use in workshops (see full workshop in Part Two) can be done alone or, even better, with a partner. Time for reflection will help with the process. We ask you to think about what really matters to you, both personally and professionally, in your practice and tell/write a story about an incident where you felt that passion and shows you working with someone that demonstrated that passion in action. It can be any length, but a page is plenty. The meanings of your values are usually clarified and communicated as they emerge through your actions as identified in your storytelling. They provide you with the evaluative criteria you use to judge improvements in what you are doing.

This is where another person is helpful (can be on videoconference, phone or present). When you read the story, write down all the values that you or your partner hear being expressed implicitly. Having someone listen to what really matters to you, we mean really listen, is amazingly energising and uplifting. If the list is long, over 20 values, some of them may be grouped together.

If you are working alone, you would share this story and list of values later with a partner who can be your critical friend.

1.6 Support: Critical Friend, Cultures of Inquiry and Ways of Knowing and Being

We think that it is worth emphasising that conducting Living Educational Theory research is challenging without suitable supports. We encourage you to find like-minded individuals to help you share your stories, challenge your assumptions and to comfort you when you run into obstacles or feel overwhelmed.

1.6.1 Critical Friend

The significance of the critical friend is three-fold: she or he can encourage and support your inquiry; your critical friend can provide data to support your claims to know your values; and they can challenge your claims. While we all espouse certain values and intend to live by adhering to those values, sometimes we violate our values and are 'living contradictions' (Whitehead, 1989a). A critical friend can be essential to this revelation and provide direction on overcoming this non-alignment with our values.

1.6.2 Culture of Inquiry

During the course of Jackie's thesis (Delong, 2002), she unveiled what she thought was a prerequisite space, a Culture of Inquiry, for educators to influence themselves, others and social formations. This Culture of Inquiry space is an environment for giving voice to teachers. She frequently exhorted them not to allow others to speak for them, to represent their embodied knowledge for and by themselves. She invited them into a Culture of Inquiry, a culture of love and support and encouragement, to unveil their embodied knowledge and create their own living-educational-theories.

If you are able to encourage a group of three to five to join you in a research journey, you can engage in "loving educational conversations" (Vaughan & Delong, 2019) and contribute to the creation of a Living Theory Culture of Inquiry where individuals are encouraged, supported and "loved into learning" (Campbell, 2011) as they create their own living-educational-theories.

When we use the language of Living (Theory) culture of Inquiry, we are meaning the creation of a safe, supportive space where you are enabled to make explicit your values and make yourself accountable for living according to those values. Moreover, it is an environment where it is safe to be vulnerable. You learn to recognize when you are not living according to your espoused values and are what Jack Whitehead calls a living contradiction. Action-reflection cycles based on asking questions like "How can I improve my teaching of these children?" become as natural as breathing. Experiencing values such as loving kindness and "loved into learning" in this democratic, non-hierarchical environment and recognition of your embodied knowledge, encourages you to take responsibility for your own learning. When we use the language of a Living culture of Inquiry we mean the unique living and embodied expressions of this living culture in the individual's practice.

(Delong, 2013, p. 26)

While groups of like-minded practitioner-researchers provide the ideal situation for encouraging and supporting you, an individual mentor can provide the same environment:

In an email (150619), Cathy Griffin, a former student, current school principal and long-term friend, described a Living Theory culture of inquiry in her response to our Skype conversation:

Cathy Griffin and Jackie Delong in a living culture of inquiry https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=vEoc-rNG4xE

A Skype session with you is a reflective, research space for me. I automatically prepare for a conversation by returning to my values and examining what I am doing in my work and my life. I enter the conversation knowing that you will be a loving listener with concern for my health and well-being above all. I also enter the conversation knowing that, as an astute LET (Living Educational Theory) researcher, you will help me identify and clarify important points in my journey to improving what I am doing and will validate or question the claims I make about my practice. That sounds so technical and 'researchy'. But the reality is much different than that because of the love that underpins the relationship and because of the loving actions you make in line with your values. For example, in the clip above, you honour my time more than once by checking if my household is getting up and needs my attention and by suggesting a next meeting time that suits my schedule which may be more complicated. You voice concern that I don't spend my weekend looking for a video clip for you but take time to relax. You voice your love at the end of each email and voice call. It may seem trite to an onlooker, but it is foundational to the work we do together. The unconditional love is an example of your values in action (ontology) and your intentional creation of a space in which it is safe to do Living Educational Theory action research.

(Delong, 2019)

In their December 2019 joint paper, Jackie and Michelle Vaughan described a Culture of Inquiry:

Experiencing values such as loving kindness and being loved into learning within this democratic, non-hierarchical environment, and the recognition of their embodied knowledge, enables individuals to improve their lives and practice by creating their own livingeducational-theories "...which includes 'I' as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 182). It is a democratic space where individuals are "loved into learning" (Campbell, 2011), where they feel supported and encouraged to share their embodied knowledge and their vulnerabilities, where 'loving educational conversations' contribute to each one creating their own living-educational-theory using their own methods and methodologies with what Dadds and Hart (2001) call 'methodological inventiveness'.

Removing hierarchies is challenging and simply saying there are none is not acceptable. I have found that creating a nonhierarchical space develops when the individuals come to recognize their own embodied knowledge, a knowledge that only they have and others do not. They may know less than the teacher/ mentor about a discipline or a process but much more about their knowing and ways of knowing.

It is the experience of both of us that, to make learners feel safe and trusted, the facilitators need to be vulnerable themselves and establish that they love the individuals in the group. Essential to the building of a Living Theory culture of inquiry is 'loving them into learning'.

> (Vaughan & Delong, 2019, p. 71–72, https:// ejolts.net/files/349.pdf)

Ideally, for your Culture of Inquiry group you would have a facilitator who has created their own living-educational-theory with you on site or virtually via videoconference.

1.6.3 Ways of Knowing and Being

As global citizens working with practitioner-researchers around the world, we have become increasingly aware that our Western ways of knowing and being are often at odds with other cultures, behaviours and expectations. In 2010, in a Skype educational conversation Jack said to the Bluewater Master's class that he found that the Canadian humility, he saw and heard, got in the way of sharing and critiquing the researcher's embodied knowledge. One of his students, Peggy Kok (Leung), was very clear that she felt Jack's suggestions for opening up and emancipating space for his students were instructions and directives. Because of her background as a Chinese woman from Singapore, she took a long time to realise that she was being encouraged to be creative in her own terms. When Moira Laidlaw worked in China from 2000 to 2006, she found the students so accustomed to the transmission mode that they struggled to take responsibility for creating their own questions.

While teaching in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, Liz Campbell experienced a tension with many of her international students from China not only in their adherence to compliant behaviours but also in the validity and rigour processes. They were living a cultural dissonance that Liz had to deal with directly so they could see themselves as knowledge producers.

Parbati Dhungana of Nepal designed a new model of professional development where the teachers examine their values and plan for their improvement based on their own concerns. This would be contrary to local policy which mandates the content and process of professional development programs from above. In her research, she found the tension of teachers expecting to be told what to do was challenging to overcome. We have encountered this tension many times. Teachers often need encouragement in believing and understanding that they already have embodied knowledge that can evolve as it is made public through the knowledge-creating activities of the teachers as they ask, research and answering their questions, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. Sometimes the tensions are the result of limitations in their contexts and cultures that may create obstacles to their freedom and capacities to generate their own knowledge and contribute this knowledge to their professional knowledge base.

1.7 Choosing a 'Doable' Concern for Investigation

Before we start the next section using the Living Theory Action Planner, we need to make the link between the unveiling of your values and starting on the journey of an investigation of a concern or problem in your practice. With your values in mind, you might consider how you could live your values of hope or joy or authenticity more fully and then how that way of living might assist you in improving your actions in your context. When it comes to choosing an area of focus for improvement, it is important to keep it within your capacity and the resources available to you. It is an admirable goal to want to improve the lives of children in poverty; however, unless that is within your realm of influence, it might be better to confine it to wanting to improve the life of one child, one group of children or one family. Your projects need to be 'doable'. Moreover, time is a limited resource.

1.8 Asking an Educational Question – How Do I Improve What I Am Doing?

Your fundamental commitment as a Living Theory researcher is to ask yourself a practical question concerning improvements in your practice. Your own 'I' in a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?', is both a subject and an object in your inquiry. There is also an assumption in Living Theory research that you will have already had the experience of resolving practical problems by defining action plans, acting, evaluating and modifying actions in the light of evaluations. You should check the questions and form of the action planner below to see if it corresponds to your approach to problem solving. It is being used in our research network as a useful introduction to Living Theory research but is by no means a prescriptive template.

There are a number of ways for you to formalise your inquiry. You may already be engaged in the process of improving your practice and wish to move directly to the action planner. If you do this then the part of the process which we would like to stress concerns question 4 in the action planner below. This question is designed to help you gather the kind of evidence which will enable you to justify or contradict your belief that your living and learning is improving.

A characteristic of many of the first Living Theory research reports we have seen is the omission of evidence related to the quality of students' learning or of your learning. We stress that the central purpose of teaching, which is to arrange conditions to enable pupils to learn, does not usually provide a focus for the evidence produced in first Living Theory reports. We mention this in the hope that we can encourage you to include evidence in your first report which enables you to justify a claim to have understood something about your pupils' learning and your influence in this learning. We will share specific examples later.

For those who would prefer a period of reflection before engaging with the action planner, we suggest you move ahead to the sections, on 'conversations with colleagues', 'on your concerns and values', 'on contradictions in practice' and 'on gathering evidence', before returning to the action planner (p. 14).

1.9 Using the Living Educational Theory Planner

LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY PLANNER FOR IMPROVING LEARNING

NAME and WORKPLACE

The Living Educational Theory Planner and Action Planner are used interchangeably in this book. Living Theory researchers usually ask questions which are directed at improving the quality of their own practice, their understanding of their practice and the social context in which their practice is located. The action planner is usually organised through discussions which help to clarify the nature of the inquiry, 'How do I improve.....?'. We have always found the following five questions useful and manageable:

- 1. What is your concern/What do you want to improve?
- 2. What are your reasons for your concern?
- 3. What might you do to improve your practice?
- 4. How will you know that your practice has improved? How are you going to find out? What kind of data will you need to collect to use as evidence to enable you to make a judgement on the outcomes of your practice in terms of the quality of your own or teachers' and/or pupils' learning?
- 5. What kind of resources will you need to enable you to implement your plan?



FRAMEWORK AND RATIONALE FOR LIVING THEORY RESEARCH

NAME and WORKPLACE

Issue/Question Response

The Living Educational Theory planner/action planner is usually organised through discussions which help to clarify the nature of the inquiry, 'How do I improve...?

- 1. What do I want to improve in my practice?
- 2. What will I do about it?
- 3. How will I know that my practice has improved? What kind of data will I collect to enable me to make a judgement on the outcomes of my practice in terms of the quality of my own or teachers' and/or pupils' learning?
- 4. How will I evaluate the educational influences of my actions?
- 5. How will I demonstrate the validity of the account of my educational influence in learning?
- 6. What kind of resources will you need to enable you to implement your plan?

1.10 Workshop for Creating Your Own Living-Educational-Theory

We have presented a 'how to' workshop many times in many countries and conferences. An example workshop in Norfolk, Vermont, USA, at the ALARA Conference 19 June 2018, conducted by ourselves and Marie Huxtable is described in full in Chapter Two of Part One.

1.11 Ethical Issues

First, you do not need anyone's permission to write your thoughts in your journals or to video record your own practice for informal, notfor-credit research. The issue becomes essential when you decide to make public your writing/video clips that involve other people. You do need the written permission of those in your context that you may be quoting or videotaping when you are about to make your writing public. You want to continue to live in your community and maintain your positive relations with those people. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out,

Insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities. For this reason, insider researchers need to build particular sorts of research-based support systems and relationships with their communities. They have to be skilled at defining clear research goals and 'lines of relating' which are specific to the project and somewhat different from their own family networks. Insider researchers also need to define closure and have skills to say 'no' and the skills to say 'continue'.

(Smith, 1999, p. 137)

Second, if you are conducting this research as part of an accredited degree, you will need to follow the University's ethical review process (REB). You cannot begin your research without REB approval and that approval would require written consent at the onset. We address this process in Part Two.

There are two benefits of publicly asking for help and for permission to share: one is that you check that those affected are comfortable with their role in the process, and you are engaging them to support you in finding evidence for your claims to know. There should be no surprises; that is, no one mentioned in the research for publication should be surprised to see themselves in the writing and/ or video data.

1.12 Data Collection: Text, Digital and Visual Data

It is important to make a clear distinction between data and evidence. Data is information that is collected that might be useful in making sense of one's research. Evidence is data that is used to justify or refute a claim to knowledge in an analysis of the data. In this process, a variety of data collection methods, primarily qualitative, are used.

For the first-time inquirer, the process is focused on the practical areas of your life that you are trying to improve. The data that you collect should focus on one or two of these that will help you to make a judgement about any kind of improvement in learning that you are seeking. We focus on the most common, most accessible data in Part One of the book and deepen the sophistication of data collection and analysis in Parts Two and Three.

1.12.1 Your Values and Intentions

Gathering this data is perhaps best done through audio/video recordings of conversations with colleagues who question you about your purposes and the intentions in, for example, a future set of lesson plans. While these conversations can be time-consuming to transcribe, they can be most rewarding because of the data they contain. For videos uploaded to YouTube on 'private', there is a 'transcribe' function (three dots) at the right-hand corner under the visual.

1.12.2 Lesson Plans and Student Work

You might need to answer questions such as,

- What do you mean by an improvement in learning? or
- What are you trying to do about learning that would be sufficient in getting this process going? or
- What can you use as evidence to show learning is taking place?

Some examples of work from your students can serve to show improvement over time. As another possibility, if you can get the students asking their own improvement questions and their plans for improvement, they can provide evidence of improvement over time.

Beginning

Sutton, R. (1997). The Learning School. Salford: RS Publications. Name: George Neeb Current Position: teaches Grade 6 at North Ward Public School, Paris, ON. Academic Background: BA Psychology McMaster, Hamilton, ON, BEd, Western, London, ON, Masters of Arts in Teaching, McMaster Areas of Interest: member of ETFO, member of Community Builders focusing on building an inclusive community in schools, enjoys Visual and Dramatic Arts Mailing Address: 33 Lincoln Ave, Brantford, Ontario N3T 4S6 © Nipissing University 1998–2011 http://oar.nipissingu.ca/archive-Vol4No2-V424E.htm (Neeb, 2020)

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