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

A presentation to the 3rd International Conference on Transformative Educational Research and Sustainable Development – TERSD (4-6 November 2022, Nepal)

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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, popularist 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

In this brief introduction we have selected background details to give some context to our research, into ‘sustaining and thriving transformative Living Educational Theory Research and practice in challenging times and contexts.’

Our 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. The development arose from stipulating a necessary condition of Living Educational Theory Research being the generation by a practitioner, a valid 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. There is no necessity to generate these explanations within Action Research, Auto-ethnographical Research, Narrative Inquiry or any other form of practitioner or educational research.

In the course of researching into their practice to understand and improve it and to generate a valid, values and evidence-based explanation of educational influences in learning it is necessary to clarify the values used by the practitioner-researcher to explain why they are doing what they are doing. Huxtable (2005) answered a similar question in:

Why do I do what I do? I want children to grow as people who are comfortable in their own skin, knowing themselves, liking themselves, at peace with themselves, knowing what they want to work on, to improve, and to have the courage to change and accept their own stumbling and that of other people as part of the journey.

I believe that an individual learns what they see themselves capable of learning and what is of value to them. The striving for excellence seems to carry with it a hope of personal fulfilment and when that personal ambition coincides with the needs of others, carries with it a hope for the progression of all of us and ‘twice affirmation’ for the individual.

... learning environment which provides the experiences and support that will enable children and young people to develop the attitudes, attributes, understandings and skills of thought full and thoughtful learners, with informed aspirations, and the confidence, competence and understanding of themselves, necessary to realise them, to their own and society’s benefit. (Huxtable, 2005, p. 51)

And in:

I believe people (young and old) grow their understandings and create valued knowledge through dialogue with themselves and others ‘How can I contribute to the flourishing of humanity as I live a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile?’ (Huxtable, 2016)

We both (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006, p.2) focused on the importance of relationally dynamic values in community-based educational research in the question, ‘How do i-we contribute to bringing into being a world where humanity flourishes?’

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 these insights from the literature to support the purpose of the paper in contributing to envisioning and realising a paradigm shift in educational research. The intention behind this shift is to empower the future of research and education in bringing into being a more harmonious, peaceful world where individuals and communities can learn to flourish and help others do so too. We are aiming to contribute to this by:

- Co-creating 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.

The literature we draw on also includes Living Educational Theory Doctorates legitimated by Universities worldwide (access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>) such as that of:

- 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:*
- Qutoshi (2016), *Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education in Pakistan:*

We also draw on published, peer-reviewed papers such as that of:

- Boland and Romero's (2017) paper, *(Re)inhabiting Waldorf Education: Honolulu Teachers Explore the Notion of Place*

- Gumede and Mellett's, (2019) paper, *Forming a 'We' through a good-quality conversation*
- Rahman, Lund, Alamin, Khalid, Krogh's, (2021) paper, *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, J. & Huxtable, M. (2022) Developing a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Community-Based Educational Research. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 11(2); 1-23.

And conference presentations such as Dhungana's (2022), *Living educational values for enhancing harmonious equitable space*, and reports such as Rawal's (2017), *Straws in the wind: An evaluation of a teacher-training programme*:

This poster is a multi-media presentation of an evaluation of a teacher-training programme carried out for all the in-service teachers of Government schools in Gujarat. This poster serves two purposes: 1 as a communication of an evaluation and 2 as a way to acknowledge the work carried out by my core-team and the other teachers. It gives me personal and professional satisfaction to demonstrate the friendship I have developed with my teacher-students as we worked in collaboration towards a common action, striving to make sense, trying to understand, each wide awake to their 'living educational theory', working towards the betterment of education for the children of Gujarat.

Rawal shared the knowledge she created in the form of living-posters, reports and papers, in response to the question she posed on her 2020 living-poster:

Are my values acceptable and useful for others in promoting a transformation in educational practice? Seeing that 'we cannot teach what we do not know'. I believe that as educators who stand for certain values, we have no option but to live them out, embody them in our quest to set an example and influence others to do the same (<http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering/documents/swaroop/swaroop-living-poster-240520.pdf>)

We, like Rawal, draw on and make public the validated knowledge we have created over the years on our websites (<https://actionresearch.net/> and <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/>).

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 an educational responsibility to continuously strive to improve one's 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.

Whitehead (1989) coined the term living-educational-theory for these explanations. 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) 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, in the course of producing an explanation of educational influence in learning, can often include insights from other methodologies. For example, researchers often draw insights from Narrative Inquiry; Self-study Research; Action Research and Autoethnography (Whitehead, 2018). Methods can include empathetic resonance with digital visual data (Whitehead, 2010; Huxtable, 2009) for clarifying and communicating the meanings of embodied values that distinguish practice as educational.

Other methods developed include

- i) The use of living-posters (ref), which has evolved from a way of enabling people to be present as individuals in communities and make connections with others working in diverse contexts and cultures, as illustrated by the living-posters of practitioner-researchers accessed from the living-posters 'homepage' found on <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>

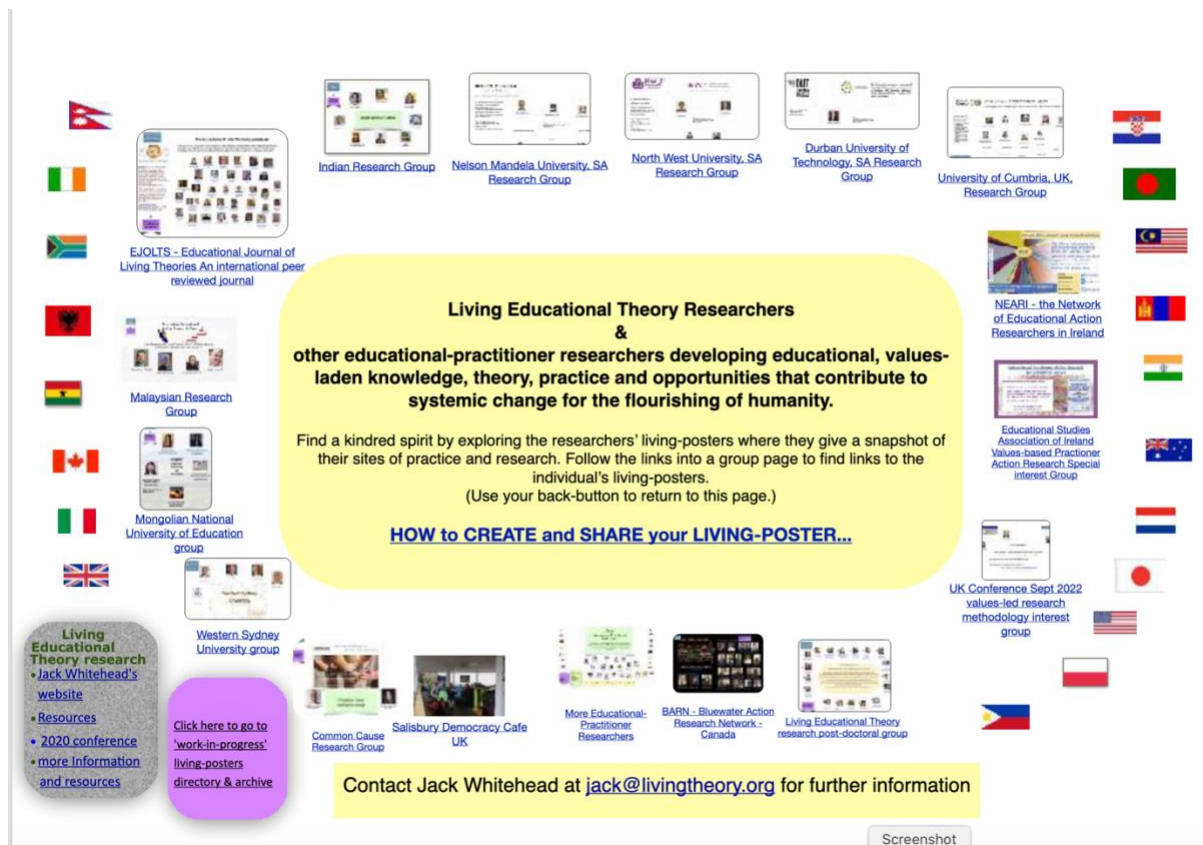


Image 1 Living-posters homepage

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

Living-posters has also been developed as a research method, as illustrated by Rawal's report (reference)

ii) Creating valid multimedia accounts

In our research, into sustaining and thriving transformative living educational theory research and practice in challenging times and contexts, we are seeking to contribute to an understanding of the relationally dynamic values that can enable communities to engage in this research. We are seeking to contribute to the communication of the realisation in practice of humanitarian and life-enhancing values, which contribute to a world in which humanity can increasingly flourish.

The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) publishes valid accounts of [living-educational-theory research](#) created by practitioner-researchers working in a wide range of global, social, cultural and professional contexts. Whitehead (1989) coined the term living-educational-theories for a practitioner-researcher's valid, values-based 'explanation for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations', created in the process of researching questions such as, 'How do I improve what I am doing':

EJOLTs publishes peer reviewed, multimedia accounts online without cost to authors or readers. To learn more about Living Educational Theory Research access papers published since 2008 and visit <https://actionresearch.net/>. If you

have questions before you submit a paper please email editor@ejolts.net. We can't promise to be able to help but we will try and we would be delighted to hear from you. We would also welcome expressions of interest. (See - <https://ejolts.net/>)

- iii) Creation of personal websites to make freely accessible Living Educational Theory Research
As illustrated by <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>, and supported <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 our intention, 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, requires, as we have stressed the acceptance of educational responsibility. That is the 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?'

Our findings and discussion are focused on values and 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 are 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, praxis-driven educational research and pedagogical practices, 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, "Living-educational-theory praxis, highlighting the fundamental importance of educators creating 'values-based

explanation of their educational influences in learning' (Whitehead, 1989a), as they research to develop praxis within living-boundaries." (Huxtable, 2012)

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 our socio-political contexts. This is shown in each living-educational-theory that is strengthened in relation to a validation process that is focused on enhancing an explanation's comprehensibility, evidence, sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and authenticity in terms of living values of human flourishing as fully as possible.

As we offer an alternative to the hegemony of technical rationality, we use Living Educational Theory to explain sustaining and thriving transformative living educational theory research and practice in challenging times and contexts. In offering our alternative 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 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:

There is a battle "for truth," or at least "around truth"- it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean "the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted," but rather "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true," it being understood also that it's a matter not of a battle "on behalf" of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of "science" and "ideology," but in terms of "truth" and "power." And thus the question of the professionalization of intellectuals and the division between intellectual and manual labour can envisaged in a new way. (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991, p. 74)

According to Foucault "Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. In his view "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power, which produces and sustains it, and to effects of power, which it induces and which extends it. A "regime" of truth:

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not to criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power), but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. (pp 74-75)

In contributing to a new politics of truth, from the perspective of Living Educational Theory Research, we accept Ryle's (1973) 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 therefore possible for people intelligently to perform some sorts of operations when they are not yet able to consider any propositions enjoining how they should be performed. Some intelligent performances are not controlled by an interior acknowledgement of the principles applied in them.

The crucial objection to the intellectualist legend is this. The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle. (p. 31)

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 the i~we relationships. These constitute the co-operative relationships which are seeking to live values of human flourishing as fully as possible.

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 some implications of the above ideas 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 reference section and respond to our most recent research. We hope that you will join us in our contributions to the next steps:

What educational practitioners have in common is the intention of contributing to the learning of communities and those who comprise them, to live values of human flourishing, and to help other people and communities to do so too. Professional educational-practitioner researchers can contribute to communities creating positive futures locally and globally by making public valid values-laden explanations of educational influence in learning. Whitehead (1989) coined the term *living-educational-theory* for such explanations. The implications of educational practitioners accepting professional responsibility for realising their humane values as fully as possible in practice, and contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase by developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research, are explored in this article. These include individuals and communities identifying where they experience their educational-practitioner self as a living contradiction, their values negated, and creating constructive ways forward—testing the validity of claims of improving educational practice that enhances educational, values-laden influences in learning—and strengthening accounts of learning to make positive social change in this complex and interconnected world through a process of social validation. Illustrative examples are given and limitations, challenges, and next steps identified. (p.1)

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