Developing a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Community-Based Educational Research[1]

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Abstract

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 and 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.

Keywords: Living Educational Theory Research, community-based educational research, values of Humanity, living-educational-theories, validity

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Introduction

> *When we reflect on the monumental challenges that exist in today's world, it is clear that we must go beyond our single-issue campaigns and dig into the very heart of how human beings understand themselves, and their relationship with our living world. To imagine a new way of being requires us to dispatch with the old narratives that anchor us to deep-rooted ideas of individualism, separatism and domination over the natural world.*
>
> *It is only through a cultural rebirth that champions our intrinsic values that human beings will have a chance of reshaping the systems that define our lives, the lives of all other living beings on our shared planet and the wellbeing of future generations. (Taylor, 2021, p. 60)*

As we write, we are aware of the wars that are raging between various communities in this interconnected world, and of Russia's invasion of the Ukraine—the latest to be of global concern. We are also aware that human beings have yet to learn how to resolve differences so that individuals, communities, and Humanity can make positive social progress rather than sow the seeds of future wars. Given the potential for global destruction, the need to imagine new ways of responding more productively to the challenge Taylor (2021) identified is urgent. In that context, we explore in this paper what the development of a Living Educational Theory Research[2] approach to community-based educational research can offer. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to understanding, improving, and explaining practice, emphasises the importance of learning to live, as fully as possible, values that carry hope for a future of Humanity flourishing in a humane world and helping others to do so too. We continue with our belief that education is a major influence on individuals, communities, and Humanity learning how to make positive social progress. The meaning we give to education here is that of a values-laden, life-long process of individuals and communities learning to live a satisfying, productive, and worthwhile life for self and others, which brings into being a humane world. By "Humanity," we mean a global social formation that transcends place and time. In this approach, an individual accepts their responsibility to research their educational practice to understand and improve it and contribute to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase. In doing this they create valid, values-laden explanations of their educational influence in their own learning to improve their educational practice, in the learning of others to improve theirs, and in the learning of social formations to make positive social progress. The individual also accepts their professional responsibility to contribute valid accounts of their research to a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021a, 2021b; Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016).

Aim

We aim to demonstrate how this research can enhance the educational influences in a community in order to be productive and ethical as individuals who comprise the community realise their values-laden responsibilities to themselves, the community, and to Humanity to bring into being a more

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[2] It is important to recognise the distinction between a living-educational-theory, which is an evidence and values-based explanation of an individual's educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others, and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located, and Living Educational Theory Research, which is the conceptual framework that distinguishes the paradigm of the research.

humane world. We also provide evidence that supports our assumption that by making public valid accounts of such research, a community can contribute to other communities and to Humanity learning to make positive social progress.

We have previously applied a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the continuing professional development of individuals in order to realise their educational responsibilities to the communities within which they practice and to Humanity. In this paper, we reexamine accounts of living-educational-theory research to understand the educational influences that adapting this approach to community-based educational research can have on the learning of communities in order to realise their values-laden responsibilities. The communities we are concerned with in this paper are those, such as universities, that are social formations created to fulfil a social need ethically. Words describe *and* bring into being a reality, so we try to use words that help to bring into being a humane world. We therefore use the word "community," to describe a social formation with a raison d'être expressed in the statements of its mission, aims, and goals together with a code of ethics - the values the community holds itself and its members accountable to in the process of fulfilling the purposes it was created for.

Positive Social Change and Education

> *Education is a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies. (UNESCO, 2017)*

We understand "education" to be a life-long values-laden process of learning to live a satisfying, productive, worthwhile life for self and others, and helping others to do so too, and contributing to Humanity's learning to flourish. Values of human flourishing (because they form the standards by which change is evaluated) define the nature of educational practice and research and the positive social change that community-based educational research is engaged in to bring about.

Community-Based Educational Research

There are various forms of community-based research. In this paper, we are focused on community-based educational research, distinguished by what makes it "educational" research. The principles of community-based participatory research constituted the theme of a 2021 special issue of this journal, *Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)*, and include:

> *Recognising that the community is the unit of study; Building on the strengths already present in the community; Continually facilitating collaboration and partnership in each phase of the research; Integrating knowledge and action; Promoting the alleviation of social inequality of co-learning; Using an interactive process; Focusing on wellness and an ecological perspective of health; Partnering in the dissemination of research findings. (Israel et al., 1998, as quoted in Koen, 2021, p. viii)*

We are extending these principles of community-based research to include the embodied values of human flourishing in a social formation and the individuals who comprise it, as explanatory principles and evaluative standards of practice that distinguish educational practice and educational research. This is consistent with the focus of the journal (ERSC, n.d.) and its publishing criteria:

> *The idea of <u>educational</u> [emphasis added] research having the potential of being transformative—through working with communities and through various participatory [educational] research approaches. (Para. 1)*

> *The research itself must lead to some form of change in at least one of the following areas: change in the researcher, change in the participants, change in the situation. (Para. 2)*

We have underlined "<u>educational</u>" above to emphasise the importance of its omission in relation to the scope and aims of the journal:

> *ERSC publishes scientific articles which draw on participatory methodologies . . . and other such empirical research, located in critical and transformative paradigms, seen as key in contributing to the transformation of education[al] research and education itself. (ERSC, n.d.)*

We believe that the omission of those two letters, "al," from the scope and aims of *ERSC* results in unintended changes to the purpose and meaning of the research methodologies and approaches adopted—and what is meant by education itself. As a consequence, individuals and communities lose sight of the educational, humanitarian values that motivate them to do what they are doing, and which serve as the explanatory principles and evaluative standards by which they judge the influence they have on learning as contributing to positive social change.

There is an important distinction between education research and education*al* research. Education research is research carried out within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the forms and fields of education knowledge such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, politics, and administration of education. Educational research is research that generates valid, evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning, together with values of human flourishing. Living Educational Theory Research, is a form of professional, practitioner educational research. The values embodied in practice by a person or community are clarified in the process of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research to serve as explanatory principles in their explanations of their educational influences in learning and the standards by which they evaluate improvement.

Embodied Values as Explanatory Principles and Evaluative Standards of Positive Social Change

Humans are motivated by various values as illustrated in Image 1.

Image 1

Values Map **(adapted from Schwartz, 2006, in Crompton, 2022)**
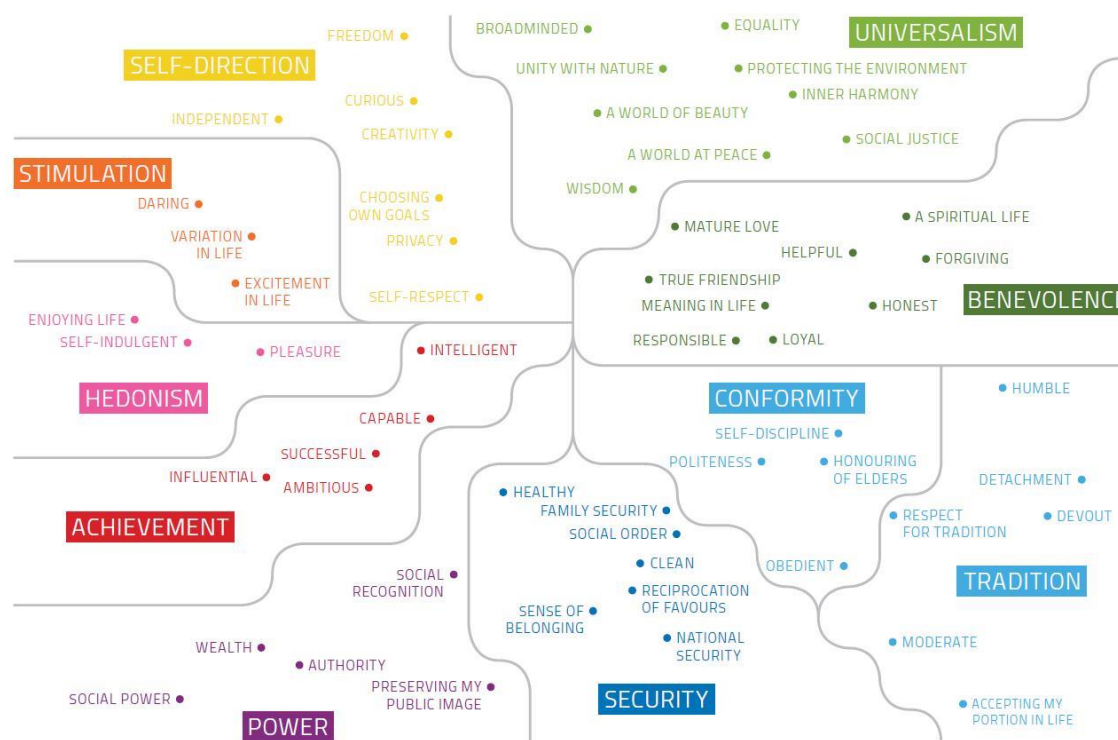
It can be argued that all people and communities embody a complex and fluid ecology of all these values, and more, with varying emphases. Values and needs are interrelated. The emphasis a person or community places on the values that are of most importance to them at any particular time, is influenced by a variety of factors such as current needs for physical and economic security, prevailing sociopolitical orientation, or how they experience social, local, global events. This has implications for what people construe as "positive" social change and the values that form their explanatory principles in explanations for what they do to enhance their educational influences in learning, and how they evaluate improvement.

Human beings are social animals and come together in social formations—not only to physically survive. A driving need of most human beings is to feel recognised (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 182–183) and valued, not only by themselves but also by others. The same appears to hold true when people get together to form a community. It seems that many communities have a need to feel they are recognised and valued by the people who comprise them and "serve." It also seems some communities want to be recognised and valued by other communities and the people who comprise them.

If Humanity is to survive, let alone flourish, in this interconnected world, a way has to be found of enabling people and communities to be able to tap into, and work with, the affirming energy of feeling recognised and valued and the creative energy that can be generated by working with difference. However, many humans often seem to find it difficult to positively engage with those who are different to themselves in, for example, appearance, thought, accent, language, ideas, values, needs. Yet, there is often more difference within groups than between them and more to be learned for positive social change from dialogue focused on exploring difference. So, what to do?

Rather than emphasising "rights," which seems to imply demands without responsibility, we believe that more progress might be made if we focused more on how to improve education. By education, we mean a life-long process of individuals and communities learning to realise their responsibilities to learn to flourish and contribute to the learning of Humanity to flourish, *and* helping others to do so too. These sentiments are intrinsic to Living Educational Theory Research. The purpose of practitioners engaging in Living Educational Theory Research is to research their educational practice to understand and improve it, and to contribute their living-educational-theory to the growth of educational knowledge. A living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) is a valid explanation created by an educational-practitioner researcher of their educational influence in the learning of themselves, others, and the social formations that are the context of the practice, to improve educational practice for positive social change. The embodied humane values clarified in the course of the research, form the explanatory principles and evaluative standards of the practice.

We have, to date, mainly focused on the implications for an individual professional educational practitioner adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to understand, improve, and explain their educational practice and create valid accounts of their living-educational-theory research. As we worked together on this paper, we extended our thinking to consider the implications for a community adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their community-based educational research to understand, improve, and explain its educational practice and to create its living-educational-theory ass a contribution to positive social change—not only for itself, but also for other communities and for Humanity. We conclude this paper with an invitation to readers to test our claims that we are contributing to positive social change through developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research and that they can do so too.

Living Educational Theory Research

Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner self-study educational research. Each has their own unique constellation of values they use to explain the meaning and purpose of their life. These values influence their practice. As they research their practice to understand, improve and explain it, they identify where they experience themselves as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) and find educational ways of learning to resolve tensions constructively. The emphasis on explaining educational influences in learning is because not all learning is educational. History shows that individuals and cultural influences can support learning that negates values of human flourishing, hence the focus in Living Educational Theory Research on learning with values of human flourishing.

Living Educational Theory Researchers use whatever methods they have available, including those from different research paradigms that help them to improve their practice and research. Where no appropriate methods are available, they try to create their own. For example, action-reflection cycles and community-based audit are drawn on from other research methodologies. Empathetic resonance with digital visual data was developed by Whitehead (2010) as a research method to clarify and communicate the meanings of embodied values as they emerged through his research. Living posters were initially developed by Huxtable to provide for educational practitioners engaged in values-led research for systemic change (which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity), an opportunity to quickly and easily communicate about their sites of practice, research passions, and interests, and see themselves in a global community of like-minded people (see https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf). Over the years, some practitioner-researchers have developed other uses for living posters, for example, as a research method to help them to identify changes in their educational practice as their circumstances change.

Practitioners engaged in Living Educational Theory Research draw insights from a range of theories from other disciplines and paradigms that help them to understand and improve their educational practice and create their evidence-based and valid explanations of their educational influences in learning. For example, when creating validation groups of some three to eight peers to help them strengthen the validity of their explanations and to take forward their research questions, drawing on Habermas's work (1976, pp. 2–3) on social validity, are put by researchers. Questions such as:

- How can I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?

- How can I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my claims to know in my explanation?

- How can I deepen and extend the sociocultural and sociohistorical understandings that influence my practice and explanations?

An example of this process can be found in the account by Kok (1991) when working on her master's of education assignment where she also drew on Winter (1989) to enhance the rigour of her research.

A Living-Educational-Theory

A living-educational-theory is a term coined by Whitehead (1989) for an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of social formations. The explanatory principles are values-laden with values of human flourishing. Each individual has their own unique constellation of values that they use as explanatory principles in explanations of their educational influences in learning.

As we engage in Living Educational Theory Research, we draw insights from knowledge generated in a variety of disciplines and fields of practice, such as that created through education research, to help understand and improve educational practice and generate valid, living-educational-theories. As we research, we create our own living-educational-theory research methodology. The application of preexisting methodologies (either individually or in any combination) to researching an "I" question cannot generate the methodology that emerges through the construction, by an individual, of their valid, evidence-based explanations of their educational influence in learning.. For a full justification of this claim, see Whitehead (2022).

In judging the nature of social change, we recognise the importance of identifying, accounting for, and militating against the influence of bias and prejudice on practice and in the research account. We therefore stress the importance of validation groups that support the mutual rational control of critical discussion (Popper, 1975). Popper developed this idea from his recognition that the objectivity of a knowledge claim could be strengthened through inter-subjective testing. The process of validation emphasises the mutual rational control of critical discussion that is grounded in an agreement between peers that the force of a better argument, rather than the power of position, will govern them.

Ethical Considerations

At the heart of Living Educational Theory Research are ethical considerations because individuals and communities hold themselves publicly accountable, in evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning, for living as fully as possible their embodied values of human flourishing. Through developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research, each individual holds themself publicly accountable for living, as fully as possible, their values and the ethics of the social formation that is the context of their practice. For example, each

professional body has an ethics statement that members are required to abide by. The British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines include that "all educational research should be conducted within an *ethic of respect for*: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom" (2018, para. 13).

All organisations concerned with education, such as a university, include a statement of their educational, values-led purpose. For example, Nelson Mandela University (n.d.) on its website states:

> *What are Nelson Mandela University's values?*
>
> *Inspired by the leadership qualities of Nelson Mandela in the transformation to democracy in South Africa, Nelson Mandela University has six core values which give us direction as to how we should behave. They are: Diversity, Excellence, Ubuntu, Social justice and equality, Integrity, Environmental stewardship. (para. 1)*

It is incumbent on universities to weave ethical considerations into their research. Alongside the ethical concerns of the organisation, professionals such as educators also have a responsibility to abide by the ethics of their professional body and to hold themselves to account for realising values of human flourishing in their individual and collective practice. They also have a responsibility to contribute to the learning of the organisation (the context of the practice) to realise its values-laden contribution to the flourishing of Humanity.

Limitations

Limitations of Living Educational Theory Research can be set by internal or external conditions. For example, we know that the mental health of people and communities can influence the rationality with which they research their practice to understand, improve, and explain it. Although Living Educational Theory Research may be experienced as therapeutic in the sense of contributing to an individual's feeling of wellbeing, it is not a therapy in the sense of a treatment for a mental health issue.

Using this research approach, practitioners have researched their practice to understand and improve it and, in the process, created valid values-laden explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others, and the learning of the social formations that form the context of the practice (Whitehead, 1989). To date, this has primarily been used by individuals who accept their professional responsibility to understand and improve their educational practice and that of others with whom they work, and to contribute valid accounts of their living-educational-theory research to a global educational knowledgebase. This can be seen both as a limitation and as an area for development. In the next section, we illustrate how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research is developing.

Results

Here, we draw on the work of Living Educational Theory Researchers to illustrate the implications of adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development for improving community-based educational research. We provide evidence that connects positive social change through a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research to global communities of practitioners with intercultural values who recognise and value individual differences within global communities without masking conflicts that require resolution when differences emerge between them. We use quotations to enable the researchers to speak for themselves.

Mark Potts (United Kingdom), Swaroop Rawal (India), and Máirín Glenn (Ireland) were the three keynote speakers at the first International Living Educational Theory Research Conference in 2020. This conference had extended an invitation to:

> *All those who, at the time, wished to develop their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research as they focused on researching the question, "How do I, individually or in cooperation with others, enhance the difference Living Educational Theory Research can make in a community (and/or an organisation) concerned with extending human flourishing?" (1st International Living Educational Theory Research Conference website,* http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering*, para. 1)*

Potts, Rawal, and Glenn introduced their research into how Living Educational Theory Research enabled them to make a difference in communities with values of human flourishing. Forty-nine researchers from 14 countries participated, with the intention of:

- Learning what practitioners engaged in Living Educational Theory Researcher are doing as they research in their own context, "How do I, individually or in cooperation with others, enhance the difference Living Educational Theory Research can make in a community (and/or an organisation) concerned with extending human flourishing?"

- Engaging in research conversations in small, relaxed, facilitated groups in breakout rooms to progress their own research and that of others, focused on the question, "How do I, individually or in cooperation with others, in my context, enhance the difference Living Educational Theory Research can make in a community (and/or an organisation) concerned with extending human flourishing?" (http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering, 2020, paras. 2–3)

Details of the conference, participants, and the recording of the keynotes can be accessed from the conference website (http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering).

Now, drawing on the published writings of Potts, Rawal, and Glenn, we illustrate the educational influence in the learning of individuals and communities to improve their educational, values-led, practice that Living Educational Theory Researchers have had in the learning of communities to make positive social progress.

Drawing on the Work of Mark Potts

A picture of the evolution and implications of Living Educational Theory as an approach to community-based educational research is provided by Mark's latest living poster and writings. Mark's latest living poster provides a multimedia snapshot of the evolution of his research journey (Image 2).

Image 2

Mark Potts's Living poster **(Potts, n.d.)**
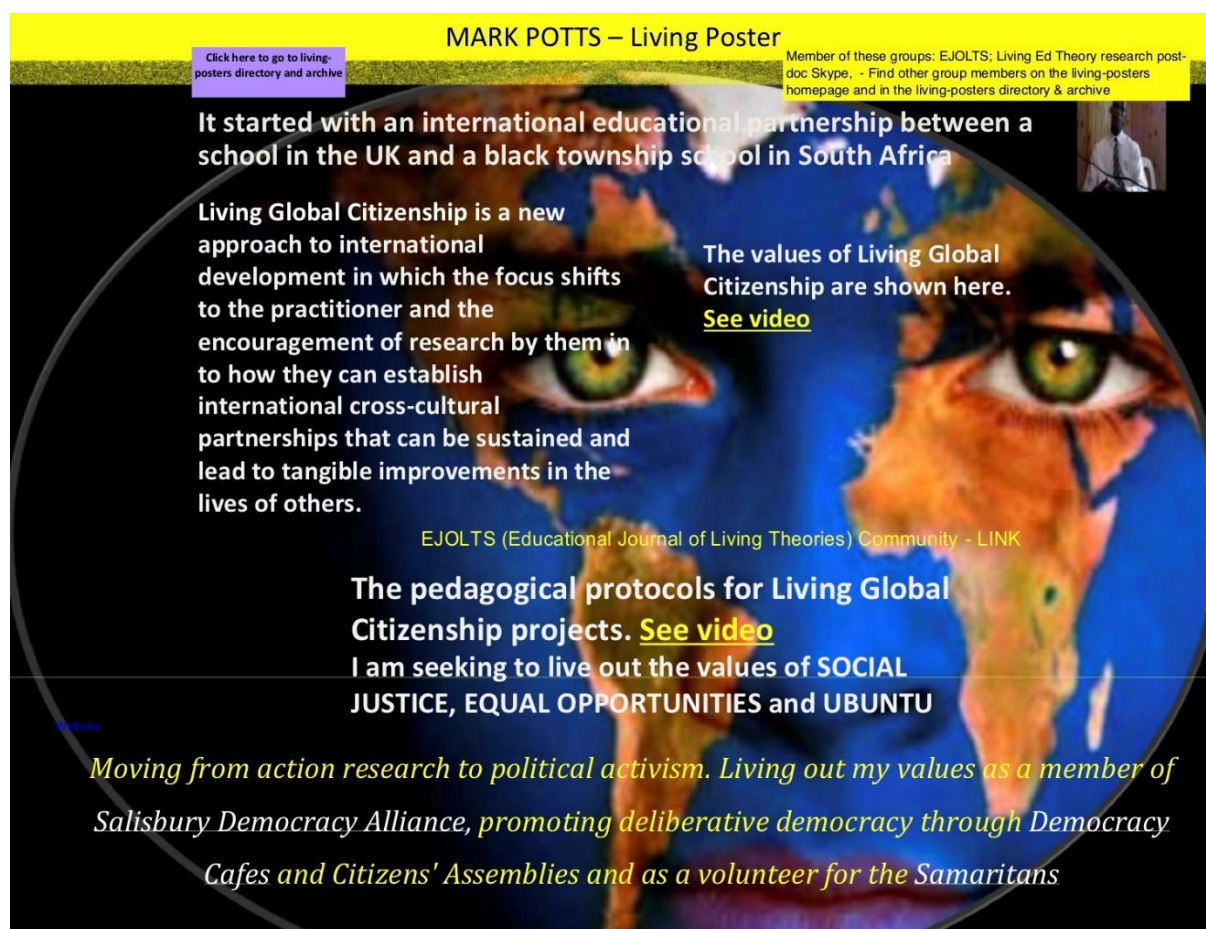
Potts completed his doctorate in 2012, contributing *living citizenship* to the global educational knowledgebase that emerged through his research into "how, over a ten-year period the partnership activities between Salisbury High School and Nqabakazulu School in the black township of KwaMashu in Durban, South Africa have influenced the education of the participants" (2012, p. 1). He left teaching but continued a professional approach to his educational practice by researching it to understand and improve it. He has continued to contribute to the growth of educational knowledge by making publically accessible valid accounts of his research, as he summarised in his paper, "Living Global Citizenship: A New Pedagogy for Citizenship Education":

> *This multi-media account is based on the ideas in the book, International Educational Development and Learning through Sustainable Partnerships (Coombs, Potts, & Whitehead, 2014). . . . I also explain why it is significant for those involved in international development work to engage in self-studies of their own influence in enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?" in ways that avoid colonisation, but enable mutual negotiation and agreement of common values. Finally, I call for others to use living-global-citizenship as a standard of judgment to help to critically evaluate and strengthen this contribution to authentic knowledge. (Potts, 2014, p. 102)*

And, more recently, researching his educational practice as a living-global-citizen:

> *This paper narrates my post-doctoral journey as a Living Theory action researcher as I seek to continue to live out my values as a global citizen without the support of an academic environment. . . . This was the motivation for my involvement in the development of a Democracy Cafe and a Citizen's Jury in my home town of Salisbury, UK. I claim that both of these activities are examples of how I am living out my values as a living-global-citizen and a democrat, in order to enhance my own learning, the learning of others and to influence the social formations in which we are operating. (Potts, 2019, p. 20)*

Swaroop Rawal, like Potts, is a member of the EJOLTs community and of a global community of values-led researchers researching for systemic change that contributes to the flourishing of Humanity (Image 3.) When she learned of Potts's work with Democracy Cafes in Salisbury (United Kingdom), she brought it into her work with the social work students she was working with in Saddar Patel University (India). The interest has spread to include others in the university community and beyond.

Image 3

Living Theory Posters Homepage **(Whitehead, n.d.a)**

Some of those who form the evolving Indian researching community with Swaroop can be seen in Image 4. To learn more about these researchers, follow the links to their living posters on the home page of living posters (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/indiangp21.pdf).

Image 4

Living posters Indian Group Page **(Whitehead, n.d.b)**
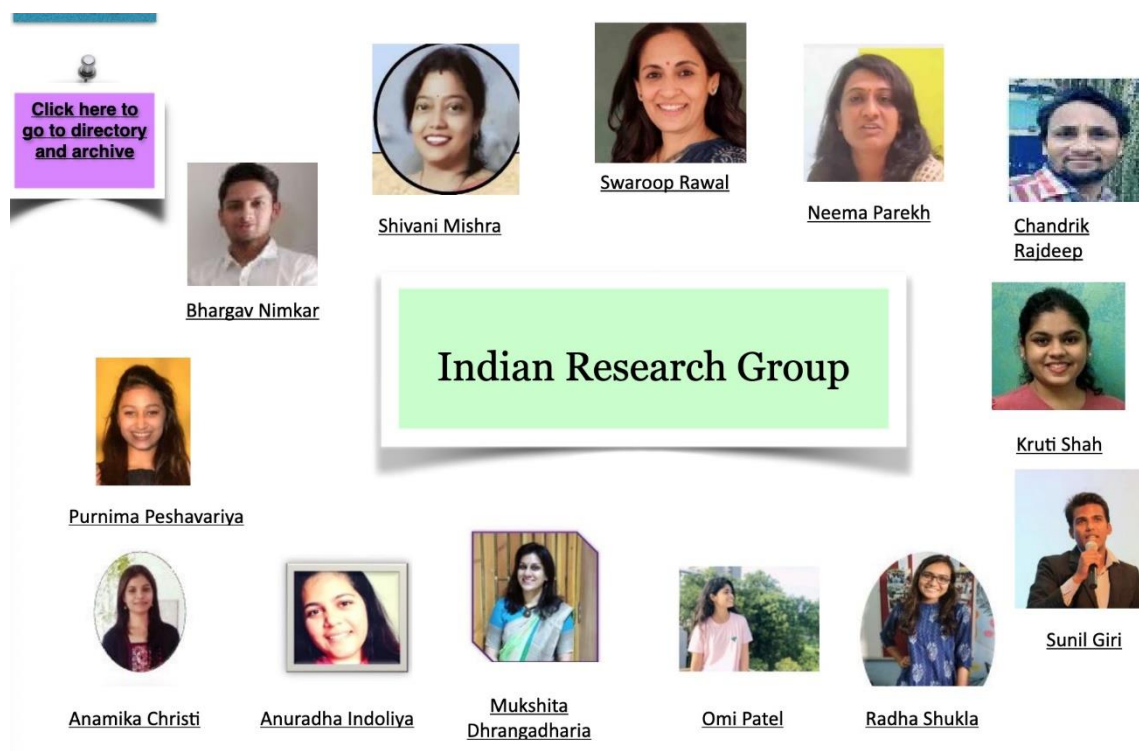
Drawing on the work of Swaroop Rawal

Rawal completed her doctoral research in 2006 (Rawal, 2006). She developed *life-skills education* "based on the premise that it promotes mental well-being in young people and equips them to face the realities of life" (Rawal, 2006, p. 73). She concluded:

> *Life skills are enhanced effectively in a participatory learning class atmosphere where students can express their feelings and opinions freely. However, in most schools in India, teachers are used to the traditional teaching method and the students are expected to accept whatever the teachers say without questioning . . . teachers need to be "educated" first so that they could be capable of facilitating human-centred lessons, thus making learning an enjoyable, stress-free experience, enabling the children to face the world with interest, curiosity and resilience. (Rawal, 2006, p. 288)*

Rawal provides a snapshot of her work and access to her contributions to the growth of educational knowledge in the form of publications on her living poster (Image 5.)

Image 5

Swaroop Rawal's Living poster (Rawal, n.d.)

Since completing her doctorate, Rawal has continued to research her educational practice to develop life skills education to improve the educational opportunities, experiences, and relationships of

children living in, not only the rural areas, but throughout India and other countries too. She provides a brief overview of the evolution and implications of adopting Living Educational Theory Research as continuing professional development for the development of her community-based educational research in Image 5. The contexts of Rawal's research are currently those of Saddar Patel University, India, and international communities of professional educational practitioners. Rawal's educational influence in the learning of communities to make positive social progress is extending at national level as she contributes, for example, to the Indian National Steering Committee for the National Curriculum Framework and are as illustrated by the titles of some of her publications, which contribute to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase: Making Magic (Rawal, 2014); Making the "Impossible" Possible: Using a Living Theory Methodology To Improve My Practice (Rawal, 2017); An Interface: How Do I Overcome Challenges To Justify and Communicate Claims to My Educational Knowledge and the Educational Influence of My Practice? (Rawal 2018).

Drawing on the Work of Máirín Glenn

On the EJOLTs living poster group page (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/ejoltsgp21.pdf), you will see Potts, and Rawal, and Glenn. Glenn's is the third voice we bring into this paper (see Image 6). Glenn is a member of the EJOLTs community, the Network of Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI; https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/neari21.pdf), and the Values-Based Practitioner Action Research Special Interest Group of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI; https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/vpar21.pdf).

Image 6

Máirín Glenn's Living poster **(Glenn, n.d.)**

Glenn is one of those leading the way developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research, working with colleagues to establish NEARI, as described by Sullivan et al. (2022, p. 1), "We explain the generation of a living-educational-theory from the research community, which was convened by the authors. We have created both a face-to-face and an online professional development community of action researchers."

Glenn completed her doctoral research in 2006, and concluded:

My living educational theory, which has been drawn from my practice, is being put forward for legitimation as I present this thesis for approval to the academy and, provided it is accepted, it, too, will become part of the new resource bank of teacher knowledge as called for by Snow (2001). It is exciting to be part of a movement and part of a university that is beginning to reconceptualise practice as a source of theory and theory as a form of creative practice. (Glenn, 2006, p. 284)

Since graduating, Glenn has continued to evolve the sites of her practice as she works with and in many communities to contribute to the learning of the communities and those who comprise them to make positive social progress and help others to do so too, for example:

- As a member of the EJOLTs editorial board, which is the community working to publish values-led research for systemic change, and which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity (see https://ejolts.net/about, the archive of publications at https://ejolts.net/archive, and also the EJOLTs living poster group page for an introduction to the community at https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/ejoltsgp21.pdf).

- Máirín, together with Bernie Sullivan, Caitriona McDonagh, and Mary Roche created NEARI as a platform for professional educational practitioner to share and support the development of their research stories and links to others who share their values and purpose in Ireland and global communities (see http://www.eari.ie/).

- ESAI with the special interest group of ESAI on values-based practitioner research (see http://www.eari.ie/values-based-practitioner-action-research-vpar-esai-special-interest-group/).

The titles of the following publications illustrate Glenn's continuing journey working with people and communities researching to understand and enhance their educational influence in learning to make positive social progress: Enhancing Practice Through Classroom Research: A Teacher's Guide to Professional Development (McDonagh et al., 2013), Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers (Sullivan et al., 2016), Learning Communities in Educational Partnerships: Action Research as Transformation (Glenn et al., 2017), Co-Convening the Network of Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI; Glenn, 2020), Connecting Research and Practice for Professionals and Communities (Glenn, 2011).

The contributions Potts, Rawal, and Glenn are each making to the learning of communities to make positive social progress are developed through their commitment to post-doctoral Living Educational Theory Research. Despite changes in personal circumstances and sites of practice, Potts has persisted since graduating in 2012, and Rawal and Glenn since graduating in 2006. Positive social change is not easy to achieve or maintain and requires a great deal of energy, creativity, and commitment to persevere for many, many years through the highs as well as the lows, when evidence of what is contributing to positive social change is hard to notice and harder to find. The work of Potts, Rawal, and Glenn illustrates the energising power of individuals gathering together for mutual support to continue to research their educational practice and generate their living-educational-theories and contribute them to the growth of not only local knowledge but also to a global educational knowledgebase. Their work also provides evidence that connects positive social change through a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research to global communities of professional educational practitioners.

We now move on to what we can learn from Living Educational Theory Research that might help people, communities, and Humanity learning to move beyond retelling stories of pain to create a space for dialogue that carries hope for positive social change.

Working With Difference

Here the three Living Educational Theory Researchers' work we draw on when trying to work with difference are those of Eden Charles, Phil Tattersall, and Jack Whitehead.

Drawing on the Work of Eden Charles

In his doctorate, on ubuntu, Charles (2007) clarified his values of *guiltless recognition* and *societal re-identification*:

> *They are intimately related concepts. Guiltless recognition allows us to move beyond the guilt and blame that maintains separation and closes down possibility. It provides a basis for action and conception that moves us towards the imagined possibilities of societal reidentification with Ubuntu. (p. 1)*

In bringing into the public domain values of guiltless recognition and societal re-identification, Charles offers a way, as Mandela and Gandhi have, for individuals and communities to go beyond reliving hurt, validating conflict, and repeating past mistakes.

Drawing on the Work of Phil Tattersall

Tattersall in his, On Becoming an Activist: A "Progress Report" on a 37-Year Journey to Date, wrote:

> *The author, writing as a 6th generation Tasmanian, tells the story of his journey to a new form of environmental activism. The influences of social context, family history and personal learning on his development as an activist are described and discussed. (2010, p. 74)*

Tattersall successfully completed his doctoral research in 2011 and offered *community-based auditing (CBA)* as an experiential tool for:

> *empowering citizens to undertake their own disciplined inquiry into natural resource issues affecting them either directly or through their role as taxpaying stakeholders. CBA has arisen in answer to the concerns of increasing numbers of citizens who seek direct input into resource planning and management. Much of the time citizens find themselves on the outside of such process and given only limited opportunity to play an active role in decision-making.*
>
> *By taking the view that citizens are "experts in their own locale," CBA creates a space where citizens can work together to develop their skills and confidence. CBA is about citizens generating valid knowledge using inquiry processes they themselves design and implement. (Tattersall, 2011, p. 263)*

Drawing on the Work of Jack Whitehead

Educational practitioners around the world are drawing on Living Educational Theory Research (Whitehead, 1989) to develop their educational practice and theory in diverse communities and fields of practice to create positive futures through contributing to positive social change in the present.

They do so by clarifying the unique constellation of the embodied values that give meaning and purpose to their educational practice, and identifying where they experience themselves as a living contradiction and/or their values negated. Other key ideas integral to a Living Educational Theory Research process are those concerned with educational practitioners accepting their professional responsibility to create accounts of the educational knowledge they believe they have created, testing the validity of their knowledge claims, and making their accounts public so as to contribute to the learning of other people, communities, and Humanity to make positive social progress.

Whitehead identified three key transformations in his work as he summarised in his 2021 paper. The first transformation (in 1976) moved from applying the models and theories of others in an individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning, to a recognition of the capacities of individuals to generate their own explanations of these educational influences. The second transformation (1988–2012), focused on the academic legitimacy of the explanations generated by individuals to explain their own learning with Whitehead's supervision of doctoral programmes in an individual's continuing professional development. The third transformation (2000–2001) involved a further shift in Whitehead's personal, intellectual, and relational awareness. This transformation involved an evolving understanding of his educational responsibilities as an educator and global citizen in enhancing the influence of community-based educational research through his role as an extraordinary professor in community-based educational research with the North-West University, South Africa.

We value our reviewers' comments about the importance of showing how an individual approach becomes collective through co-creating outputs with others focused on their Living Educational Theory Research. Thus, by way of example, the communities of practice at Nelson Mandela University, North-West University, and Durban University of Technology in South Africa are exploring the implications of clarifying and sharing an ubuntu way of living for their collective development of values on a global scale. For evidence of this see:

- Durban University of Technology's home page of living posters (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/dut22.pdf) with Nalini Chitterand's work as an academic development practitioner-scholar in which she is embodying the values of ubuntu.

- North-West University's home page of living posters (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/nwu22.pdf) with Corné van der Vyver's focus on strengthening community identity through storytelling as a teaching strategy (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/corne22.pdf). See also Lesley Wood's research in community-based educational research into the well-being of learners, teachers, and community members (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/lesley22.pdf).

- Nelson Mandela University's home page of living posters (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/nmu22.pdf), which is focused on professionals in higher education working together to research their professional educational practice to understand, improve, and explain it and publish the results of their high quality research to impact on policy and practice. See also Bruce Damon's living posters (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/bruce22.pdf) with his contribution to academic engagement and collaboration in advancing the

aspiration of Nelson Mandela University as a transformative, responsive, African university in service of and with society.

Developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research as values-led research for systemic change that contributes to the flourishing of Humanity is a "slow burn" rather than a "flash in the pan." Therefore, evidence both of its development and contribution to creating positive futures through social change are sometimes only evident when looked for with the benefit of hindsight. During 2020 and 2021, the world was locked down to a greater or lesser extent in an effort to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. Whitehead made the best of the opportunity this afforded by contributing in the virtual world to communities locked down in the physical world and developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research. He provided many virtual keynotes, workshops, and support to communities in Malaysia, Mauritius, Croatia, South Africa, Nepal, Greece, Ireland, United Kingdom, and India—contributing to the learning of communities and those who comprise them to live values of human flourishing and to help other people, communities and Humanity learning to do so too. The development of more of these communities can be seen on the living posters homepage (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf).

We agree with a reviewer's comment that communities can realise their values-laden responsibilities when they are collectively co-creating and reflecting on their values-laden and lifelong learning processes. Community-based educational requires collective action and outputs. We think that this recognition can be seen clearly in our contributions to the NEARI meeting on critical reflections in educational practice (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwNEARImeet020422.pdf) and to transforming practices in higher education through critical reflection in the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association's Professional Learning Project (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwheltasa140722.pdf).

Conclusion

We conclude this paper with an invitation to readers to test our claims that we are contributing to positive social change through developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research—and that they can do so too.

Answering Our Research Question

By offering this paper as an answer to our research question, "How are we contributing to positive social change through a Living Educational Theory Research approach to community-based educational research," we believe we are contributing to positive social change. At the heart of this approach are individuals and communities who accept their personal responsibilities for living values of human flourishing as fully as possible. And who also accept professional responsibility as educators and educational practitioners to research our educational values-led practice, test the validity of the educational knowledge we generate, and contribute to the growth of a global professional knowledgebase of education in the process.

We recognise that our systemic influence in spreading the global influence of Living Educational Theory Research rests upon many people being convinced of the worthwhileness of developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their community-based educational research. We also recognise that for values-led research to have a systemic influence in the learning of a community to understand and improve its educational practice requires time, energy, and persistence by individuals who accept their personal and professional educational responsibilities.

We have identified that this is helped when individuals identify others who recognise and value them and what they are doing and make a connection. Further work is needed to identify the necessary conditions for a community to work productively with the tension of identifying itself as a living contradiction and testing the validity of its educational knowledge claims to enhance its learning of how to understand and improve its educational practice that spreads positive social change— particularly when it feels its values and needs are denied by another community.

Implications

One implication concerns the nature of the "we" in the question, "How are we contributing to positive social change?" So far, the implication has been focused on moving from "I" and "my" in the question. Moving from I to we, without subsuming the integrity of the individual I by the we, requires continual recognition of the value of the other, together with recognition of the quality of the co-created community they form. We recognise a quality expressed in Africa as ubuntu, which we understand as a way of being that embodies a meaning: I am because we are and we are because I am. Gumede and Mellett (2019) offered some ideas on how they realised such a meaning in practice as they analysed their own movement as individuals working together on a paper. They moved from separate "I"s to an integrated "we" through good quality conversations in which Ubuntu defined the quality of their cooperative relationship:

> *Many Living Theory papers are jointly authored and written with a voice that uses the collective pronoun "We." By what process can separate, isolated "I's" claim to become a composite "We"? This paper discusses the process by which its authors—two initially, separate authoring voices—came to feel able to claim that they can speak as a believable and authentic "We." The process of that merging develops around the concept of a "good quality conversation." (p. 23)*

An implication yet to be explored is that of asking the above question with a commitment to improving the educational practice of a community and those who comprise it without individuals subordinating or dominating. It requires a commitment to educational conversations over time that, while looking for points of resonance, do not shy away from recognising, understanding, and working to learn from differences. Many of these differences can contribute to extending each individual's cognitive ranges and concerns if worked with creatively, and if the others feel recognised and valued. Another implication yet to be explored is that of a community asking the above question with a commitment to understanding and improving its educational practice and contributing to Humanity learning to flourish with humane values, and helping other communities to do so too.

We conclude the paper with an invitation to readers to test our claim that by adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their community-based educational research, they can contribute to positive social change for themselves, their community, and other communities so Humanity can learn to flourish in a humane interconnected world.

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