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Action Research, researching values-led actions and changing lives: Creating and learning from multiple ways of collaborating to change our selves, our communities and societies, for the common good.

CARN 2022 conference 28th– 30th October,
National College of Ireland, Dublin
Changing Lives through Action Research

Subtheme Educational and educative change

Marie Huxtable, University of Cumbria, UK. Marie_huxtable@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

The significance of the paper for those engaging in Action Research, is in how, by developing their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research and other values-led research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity, they can more fully realise their potential for changing lives for the common good.

This paper is also focused on exploring the question, “How do I recognise, value and work with insights Action Research offers practitioner-researchers developing methodological rigour and innovation to understand, improve and explain their values-led practice for the common good?” Methods are used to demonstrate how Action Researchers engage with other values-led practitioner-researchers, to change themselves, their communities and societies, for the common good, while respecting and working with diverse voices and perspectives. I draw on the work of practitioners working in diverse fields and contexts engaged in researching their values-led practice and generating valid accounts of their living-educational-theory research for the common good and the good of the communities they live and work in. For example, the data drawn on includes doctoral and masters research of practitioners living and working in diverse cultural and physical contexts around the world. Papers published in the Educational Journal of Living Theories and other peer-reviewed journals, and accredited masters and doctorates are also drawn on. These are used to illustrate how practitioner-researchers can draw insights from accounts of other people’s Action Research and their own, to improve their contribution to a global knowledgebase all can draw on for the greater good

Introduction

My motivations for wanting to contribute a paper to the CARN 2022 conference comes from my desire to promote and support education as a life-long values-laden educational process of learning to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for self and others and helping others do so too. Implied are responsibilities for contributing to educational and educative change of individual people, local, national, and international communities, and Humanity as a global social formation, which transcends time and place.

The significance of the paper for those engaging in Action Research, is in how, by developing their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research and other values-led research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity, they can more fully realise their potential for changing lives for the common good. This paper is also focused on exploring the question, “How do I recognise, value and work with insights that Action Research offers practitioner-researchers developing methodological rigour and innovation to understand, improve and explain their values-led practice for the common good?” Not all practitioner-researchers are action researchers, whilst all action researchers are practitioner-researchers in the sense that they are researching their own practice with the use of action-reflection cycles.

I draw on the work of practitioners working in diverse fields and contexts engaged in researching their values-led practice for the common good and the good of the communities they live and work in. The data drawn on will include conference presentations, published papers, and doctoral and masters research of practitioners.

Originality includes methods used to demonstrate how Action Researchers engage with other values-led practitioner-researchers, to change ourselves, our communities and societies, for the common good, while respecting and working with diverse voices and perspectives.

Significance is in the contribution engaging in Living Educational Theory Research may make to Action Researchers more fully realising their potential for changing lives for the common good by developing and spreading understanding, knowledge and practice of values-led research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity.

In what follows I will:

- Summarise key aspects of Living Educational Theory Research for professional practitioners researching their values-led actions to change lives
- Clarify the methods used for creating what is offered in this paper
- Provide illustrative examples of implications for practitioners of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research creating and learning from multiple ways of collaborating to change our selves, our communities and societies, for the common good.
- Conclude with thoughts about – so what and what now?

Living Educational Theory Research

The Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) declares it is committed to:

... supporting and improving the quality of professional practice, through systematic, critical, and creative inquiry into the goals, processes and contexts of professional work.

<https://www.carn.org.uk/>

Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner educational research. Developing their understanding, knowledge and practice of Living Educational Theory Research therefore offers CARN members an opportunity to improve the quality of their professional practice, create and learn from multiple ways of collaborating to change them selves, their communities and societies, for the common good.

Living Educational Theory Research is an approach and a research methodology, which enables practitioners *to be* professional, whether or not they belong to a profession. I am making a distinction between a practitioner *being* professional and a practitioner meeting the requirements for membership of a profession. This has been clarified before; see Whitehead & Huxtable, (2021) for most recent example. Here I am focussing on just two aspects of Living Educational Theory Research as professional practice. As a practitioner engages in Living Educational Theory Research they are *being* professional practitioners as they accept responsibility for:

- Their practice and the consequences for people, individually and collectively, learning to live satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives for themselves and others and helping others do so too. They therefore accept a responsibility to research into their practice to understand, improve and explain it, generate valid explanations of their educational influences in the learning of others and the social formations, which form the complex ecologies within which they practice *and*
- Contributing knowledge generated in the course of researching their practice, to a global growth of knowledge with values of human flourishing for the benefit of all.

Living Educational Theory Research is of particular relevance to this conference especially given the subtheme 'educational and educative change'. Living Educational Theory Research can be understood as 'educational research' and as research that is educational. I am taking 'educational and educative change' to refer to a life-long values-laden process of learning to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for self and others and helping others to do so too. I am taking 'educational research'

to be research that is distinguished from other forms of research both by the educational intentions of the researcher engaging in the research as well as the nature of the knowledge created (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021). Living Educational Theory Research therefore has ontological and epistemological implications for practitioners seeking to enhance their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the social formations, which form the context of their practice, and their contribution to bringing into being a world with values of human flourishing.

A living-educational-theory a term coined by Whitehead (1989) for a researcher’s validated explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, *and* in the learning of others *and* in the learning of the social formations within which their practice located. The researcher and ‘others’ are in an i~we relationship (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006) where the uniqueness of an individual’s relational ‘i’ is recognised and valued and each individual ‘i’ is neither subordinate nor dominant to the collective ‘we’. It is what I am coming to understand as expressed by the various embodied meanings of Ubuntu ‘I am because we are and we are because I am’ and Ikigai (image 1) and implied in the subthemes of the CARN 2022 annual conference, such as those of community action and activism, knowledge democratisation, social cohesion, ethical leadership and followership, diverse voices and perspectives, social justice and equity, educational and educative change, health and wellbeing.

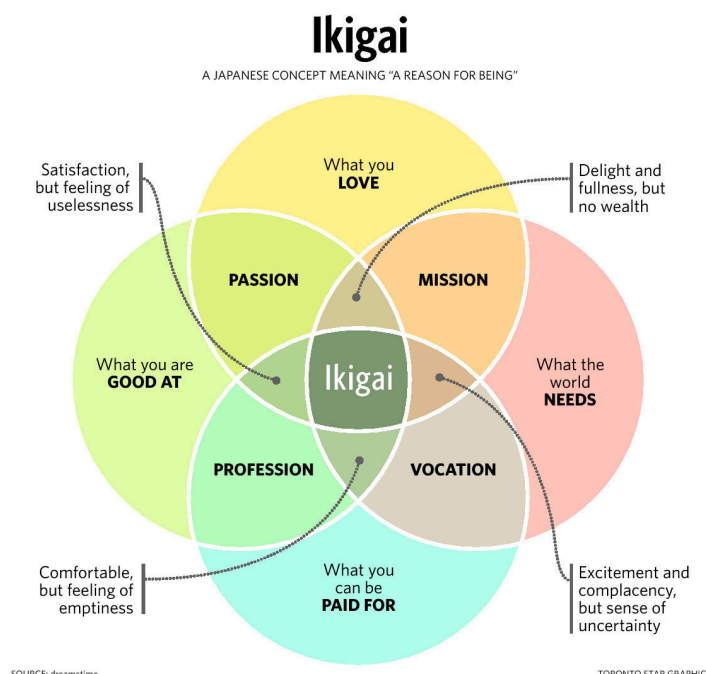


Image 1. A representation of a Western understanding of the Japanese value, Ikigai.

Here I focus on some of the key distinguishing features of Living Educational Theory Research of particular relevance to improving the academic, intellectual and scholarly contributions as illustrated by CARN 2022 subthemes: knowledge ecologies, critical pedagogies, and methodological rigour and innovation. As the practitioner engages in Living Educational Theory Research to their practice to understand, improve and explain it and generate a valid explanation of their educational influence in learning:

- **The practitioner recognises, clarifies, challenges and evolves the embodied meaning of the personal and social values that give their practice meaning and purpose.** Crompton ref – better source for...
- **As the research proceeds the practitioner seeks, collects and analyses data to:**
 - o **Clarify the embodied meanings** of the practitioner’s relational values, which form their evaluative standards, and explanatory principles of the practice in the social formations that form the context of the practice they are researching to understand, improve and explain. The process of collecting and analysing data creates change – researcher does not seek to eliminate their bias but capitalise on

it. – you get what you look for – assessment is intervention – you can not look without changing not only what you are looking for but other things too. In the process of the researcher clarifying the meanings of their embodied values of human flourishing as they emerge through the research, their practice is changed in the direction of the values

- **Clarify significant intra, inter and extra-personal contexts** which form the multidimensional, relationally dynamic complex ecologies of the practice being researched. In the process the researcher extends their cognitive range and concern, they create changes, whether micro or macro, in what they and others within the social formation are doing...
 - **Identify the educational influences in learning** their practice is having
 - **Identify other influences what they are doing is having**
 - **Identify where they experience themselves as a living-contradiction** and/or their values contradicted by others and/or their context
 - **Inform the development of ideas as to what they might do to improve** the situation of an individual and/or community and the potential ramifications of various courses – what improves the situation for one is not necessarily good for another and what serves a ‘local’ good may not serve the ‘greater’ good and may have devastating long-term consequences for Humanity and the planet.
 - **Enable them to communicate the embodied meanings of the values** which form the explanatory principles in their explanations of educational influences in learning
 - **As evidence in support of their knowledge claims** in accounts of their Living Educational Theory Research
- **The practitioner brings accounts of their research to a ‘validation’ group of peers** to help them improve their research and strengthen their account.
 - **The practitioner test the validity of their knowledge claims and contribute to the global growth of educational knowledge for the benefit of all** by submitting an account of their research for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, presentation at a conference or examination for an academic degree.

Methods used

Methods used include:

- Living posters – homepage global/international context and individual posters personal and local context (see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>)
- Published Living Educational Theory Research multimedia narratives, Doctorates and Masters (see <https://ejolts.net/>, <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> and <https://actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>)

Illustrative examples of implications for practitioners of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research

The international spread of the Living Educational Theory Research can be appreciated by visiting the homepage of the living-posters

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>. Living Educational Theory Researchers and other educational-practitioner researchers developing educational, values-laden knowledge, theory, practice and opportunities that contribute to systemic change for the flourishing of humanity in nineteen countries are present. Going into each group and following the link to individual’s living-poster gives an appreciation of the diversity of contexts the practitioners are contributing to and the diversity of research passions and interests, sharing a common intention – engage in professional practitioner educational research to contribute to Humanity learning to flourish in an interconnected world. These are just a few to illustrate the diverse voices and perspective. I have selected them from South African groups as the names of the people leading them give an indication of the complex normative socio, historical and cultural backgrounds of the practitioners, which are part of the complex ecologies that contribute to understanding the diverse embodied meanings of ubuntu:

environment. On leaving my role as a full-time educator in a UK state school, the challenge for me was to continue being a Living Theory action researcher whilst engaging with real-world politics. My desire to continue to live out my values as a living-global-citizen led me to move from action research into political activism. The vote to leave the EU in June 2016 was the catalyst for me to become more active in politics. My belief in democracy was shaken and it led me to consider how I could enhance the democratic process through forms of deliberative democracy. 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.

Mark connected with Swaroop Rawal through the Living Educational Theory Research community. Swaroop was working with Social Work students in Sadar Patel University, India. Swaroop brought Mark's work from South Africa to Salisbury into her work in India. An insight into Swaroop's work can be gained from her living-poster - access from the Indian Research group she has started – see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/indiangp21.pdf>.

Which takes me to published Living Educational Theory Research multimedia narratives and particularly those published by the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) as the Editorial Board develop cooperative democratic ways of creating EJOLTs together. EJOLTs is published with no cost to authors or readers, publishes papers using ELF (English as a lingua franca) to reach an international audience and translations provided by authors to reach audiences with place specific languages and has developed a two stage review process; first the traditional double blind, papers that progress to the second stage where reviewers work with authors to extend their understanding, knowledge and practice of Living Educational Theory Research as they strengthen their paper to meet all the publishing criteria well. Reviewers and authors at this stage work together in the virtual space of cooperation. Current conversations can be contributed to and learned from at <https://ejolts.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=5> and past conversations can be accessed from <https://ejolts.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=16>.

The papers that comprise the 2021 December issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) each speak to the subthemes of the CARN 2022 conference subthemes:

- Community action and activism
- Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation
- Ethical leadership and followership in troublesome times
- Improving practice in the face of adversity & pandemics
- Including diverse voices and perspectives
- Social Justice and equity
- Educational and educative change
- Critical pedagogies
- Health and wellbeing
- Social cohesion
- Methodological rigour and innovation

It also illustrates the cooperative democratic values members of the EJOLTs Editorial Board and Development Team embody, which form the evaluative standards of their practice creating and learning from multiple ways of collaborating to change them selves, their communities and societies, for the common good.

Whitehead, J. (2021) Editorial Foreword, EJOLTs 14(2), i-iv <https://ejolts.net/node/377>

This editorial of December 2021 is written at a time when the world continues to reel from the effects of COVID-19. Foreword of issue 13(2) of December 2020 I wrote optimistically that, "it is likely to be well into 2021 before the beneficial influences of vaccines will be felt through the world". Whilst these influences are being felt the omicron mutation of the virus

is spreading and the pandemic continues. There is still much to be done in establishing an equitable sharing of vaccines throughout the world.

Working and researching in global contexts affected by the pandemic, Living Educational Theory Researchers continue to contribute their educational knowledge to the professional knowledgebase of education as they ask, research and answer questions of the kind, 'How do we improve our practice as global citizens as our individual and collective contributions to bringing into being a world of human flourishing?'

Gonzalez, J, Farrell, J, Auguste, S (2021) A portrait of becoming: Transformative teacher education through an offshore location in the Bahamas. *EJOLTs* 14(2), 1-25 <https://ejolts.net/node/378>

This study illustrates the professional learning that occurred among us as we came together to co-construct the curriculum for students enrolled in a master's program in the Bahamas. In choosing to examine the phenomena under investigation through an action research/self-study lens, we hoped to elucidate the dynamics of our individual and collaborative living-educational-theory experiences. As such, our study sought to address the question: 'How is my/our professional learning impacted as we collaboratively construct curricular experiences for fellow educators in an international context, which focused on the social, cultural, and historical context of our actions in this professional learning relationship?' Our inquiry revealed the emergence of four primary themes: embracing culture; openness/academic freedom vs. control/authority; mentoring and collegial coaching; and becoming/transformation/self-actualization.

Rahman, MHafizur, Lund, T, Alamin, M, Khalid, Abin Mujib, Krogh, E. (2021). Developing a transformative, cooperative living-educational-theory with children and youth in the EDS (Education for Development and Sustainability) community of practice in Bangladesh *EJOLTs* 14(2), 26-50. <https://ejolts.net/node/379>

The new generation is key to reaching the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. But to solve complex, global challenges and create sustainable development requires changes in the education system toward new ways of learning and knowing, as well as developing capabilities to act. In 2005, we (Md Hafizur Rahman, Md Alamin, and Trine Lund) therefore established a community of practice in Bangladesh called Education for Development and Sustainability (EDS), where we mentor vulnerable children and youth to become change agents, teachers, and leaders who, in turn, mentor younger children and youth. In this article, we explore the questions, 'How can we mentor for transformative learning?' and 'How can we explain the related inner change?' Finally, we discuss the transformative, cooperative living-educational-theory we developed in the process. We do this by following the transformative journey of the EDS teacher Abdullah bin Mujib bin Abdul Khalid, and by reflecting on the values behind our mentoring and how this research has influenced us as action researchers. In this way, we aim to contribute to Living Educational Theory Research. During our process as action researchers, Erling Krogh and Sigrid Gjøtterud contributed substantially to our professional reflections and to the development of our living-educational-theory research.

Shrestha, B (2021). Working on failures and vulnerabilities: Improving my practice leading an educational initiative concerned with Emotional Intelligence in Nepal. *EJOLTs* 14(2), English 51-77, Nepalese, I-XXXIII. <https://ejolts.net/node/380>

I interact with three different orders of reality – the natural, the practical, and the discursive – as I develop my human emotionality concerning failures and vulnerabilities. This article investigates and documents my journey towards social engagement, acknowledging and working on my failures and vulnerabilities as a part of being human. Influenced strongly by the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2009) on a Living Educational Theory approach to Action Research, I posed a research question for my Ph.D. studies, 'How can I improve my practice as the founder and educator of an education initiative to foster emotional intelligence for the transformation in self and others?'

This article is based on my personal experience documented using a multi-media narrative approach and the method of empathetic resonance (Sardello, 2009) and the personal knowledge gained over the past five years through critical reflection. I take this article as the documentation of the beginning of my continuous evolution of working on my living value that is accepting my vulnerabilities and failures and working on it as a Living Educational Theory researcher for whom the flourishing of humanity is through her work as an educator who has been improving her practices while trying to enable transformation in others.

And to conclude this section I want to illustrate that all can develop as professional practitioners, irrespective of age by engaging in Living Educational Theory Research:

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<https://actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounterull.pdf>

10 year olds - Bogнар, B. & Zovko, M. (2008)
Pupils as action researchers: improving something important in our lives. *EJOLTs* 1(1), 1-49.
<https://ejolts.net/node/82>

Concluding

So what? I have offered evidence to demonstrate that engaging in Living Educational Theory Research enables practitioners to research their values-led actions in a way that changes lives as they create and learn from multiple ways of collaborating to change self, communities and societies, for the common good.

What now? That leads me to leave you with an invitation to develop your knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research and contribute the knowledge you generate in the process to the growth of global knowledge for the flourishing of Humanity with values such as those of a cooperative democracy, ubuntu, Ikigai, and those expressed by Hillel over 2,000 years ago:

'If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?' (English translation, Ethics of the Fathers, Pirkei Avot, 1:14)

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