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Co-Creating Knowledge, Empowering Communities Through Living Educational Theory Research.

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Presented at the 2021 Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) on the 18th June 2021 with the theme ‘Co-creating Knowledge, Empowering Communities’.

Purpose and Aim

The purpose is to provide an evidence-based explanation of how Living Educational Theory research, in a community of practitioner-researchers, can influence the co-creation of educational knowledge and empowering communities. This includes the expression of educational responsibilities, within and between people working in different cultural contexts in Nepal, India, USA, Canada and the UK, to create and preserve their contributions to an archive of Living Educational Theory Research. My aim is to make public, valid knowledge created through values-laden research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of humanity. I am fulfilling this aim through presenting the meanings of the values used by practitioner-researchers as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning, with the values of human flourishing.

Keywords: Co-creating Knowledge; Empowering Communities; Living Educational Theory research.

Theoretical Perspectives

Insights are drawn from Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 2019) and Community Based Auditing (Tattersall’s 2007) in explaining how a community of educational practice fulfils the value of educational responsibility in improve educational practices and contributing to the global knowledgebase of education. Insights are also drawn from Delong’s (2002; 2021) research on cultures of inquiry and Living Educational Theory Research cultures of inquiry in explaining educational influences in learning, as global citizens, with values of human flourishing. The theoretical perspectives include Maxwell’s (2021) analysis of three blunders in the Traditional Enlightenment. The paper explains how these blunders can be overcome in wisdom-inquiry. Lupson and Hayes’ (2021) analysis of 5 great mistakes in education policy, is used to highlight the importance of focusing on enhancing the professionalism of teachers.

In Living Educational Theory research, practitioner-researchers explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing in my educational practice?’. They generate valid, evidence-based explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence their practice and understandings. The validity of the explanations is strengthened with the help of Validation Groups of some 3-8 academic peers who respond to the questions:

- i) How do I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- ii) How do I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the claims I make?

- iii) How do I deepen and extend the understandings of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in my practice and explanation?
- iv) How do I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in terms of living the values of human flourishing?

The rigour of the research is enhanced by applying Winter's (1989) six principles of dialectical and reflexive critique, multiple resource, plural structure, risk and theory practice transformation to an explanation. Peggy Kok (1995) has demonstrated how the application of these six principles enhanced the rigour of her research into the art of an educational inquirer.

Tattersall (2007) has focused on a method of Community Based Auditing in undertaking an individual's disciplined inquiry:

Community Based Auditing (CBA) Tattersall, 2007, p. 32) is essentially 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. Although still evolving, Community Based Auditing serves as a good example of how citizens can be effective managers of change.

The importance of an audit is to check the validity of an evidence-based explanation, of the influence of a community-based project, on the focus of concern:

While each member brought unique experiences and expertise to the group, there was a common concern that stood out from the myriad of natural resource issues we had dealt with over a collective period of some 80 years. The focus of the concern was the way in which citizens were being treated by industry and government. It was clear to us that citizens were somehow left out of key decision-making processes. (p.33)

I have been influenced by Said's focus on the importance of his second meaning of culture as I draw insights from DeLong's (2002; 2021) research, on cultures of inquiry and Living Educational Theory cultures of inquiry,:

Second, and almost imperceptible, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. As Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s.... In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation of the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. (Said, pp. xii-xiv, 1993)

I am claiming that knowledge generated through Living Educational Theory Research contributes to cultures. These contributions include refining and elevating contributions to a knowledgebase. These knowledge-bases serve as reservoirs of the best that a society has known and thought. I hold this view because of the contributions that Living Educational Theory Research is making to enhancing the flow of values of human flourishing. An example of evidence which justifies my claim is to be found in Delong's thesis (2002), where she shows the importance of building a culture of inquiry for the creation of educational knowledge:

The originality of the contribution of this thesis to the academic and professional knowledge-base of education is in the systematic way I transform my embodied educational values into educational standards of practice and judgement in the creation of my living educational theory. In the thesis I demonstrate how these values and standards can be used critically both to test the validity of my knowledge-claims and to be a powerful motivator in my living educational inquiry.

The values and standards are defined in terms of valuing the other in my professional practice, building a culture of inquiry, reflection and scholarship and creating knowledge. (Abstract)

The titles of these following papers by Delong illustrate the practical implications for cultures of inquiry, in co-creating knowledge, empowering communities through Living Educational Theory Research.

[J. Delong, Griffin, C., Campbell, E., and Whitehead, J., "The significance of living-theory action research in a culture of inquiry transforms learning in elementary, high school and post-graduate settings", *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, vol. 6, pp. 78-96, 2013.](#)

[J. Delong, "Transforming teaching and learning through living-theory action research In a culture-of-inquiry", *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, vol. 6, pp. 25-44, 2013](#)

[J. Delong, "Dialogical relationships in living cultures of inquiry for the creation of living-theories", *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, vol. 12, pp. 1-22, 2019](#)

[J. Delong, "Raising Voices Using Dialogue as a Research Method for Creating living-educational-theories in Cultures of Inquiry.", *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, vol. 13, pp. 71-92, 2020](#)

In strengthening the validity of a living-educational-theory, a validation group responds to the explanation of educational influence in the learning of a social formation, by engaging with the question of deepening and extending the researcher's understanding of the sociocultural influences in the researcher's practice and explanation. The importance of the cultural influences of Living Educational Theory Research is worth repeating. It is the importance of making a refining and elevating contribution to a society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.

Maxwell (2021) makes a distinction between the 'Traditional Enlightenment' and the 'Profound Enlightenment'. Maxwell distinguishes the following three blunders in the Traditional Enlightenment and explains how they can be overcome in wisdom-inquiry:

- i) The Traditional Enlightenment believes that scientific method involved accepting and rejecting theories solely on the basis of evidence, nothing being accepted as a part of scientific knowledge independently of evidence.
- ii) The Traditional Enlightenment generalized this concept of method, in effect, so that it could be applied to social science.
- iii) The Traditional Enlightenment sought to develop social science alongside nature science.

Maxwell states that ‘the outcome of these three blunders, academia devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, is still with us today’ (p.38).

In co-creating knowledge and empowering communities through Living Educational Theory Research, the following methods are important

Methods

The methods used include empathetic resonance with digital visual data to clarify the meanings of the energy-flowing values of human flourishing that are used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. Empathy is the first of the main characteristics of a participatory research programme, distinguish by Skolimowski (1994) below. These values are also used to judge what counts as an improvement in practice. The methods include the validation groups described above. The educational inquiry process used in Living Educational Theory Research can include action-reflection cycles focused on the improvement of practice and the co-creation of educational knowledge.

Participatory Research Programmes

Let us address some of the detail. How do we do that participatory research?

What are some of its main characteristics?

The participatory research is the art of *empathy* –
 Is the art of *communion* with the object of enquiry –
 Is the art of learning to use *its* language –
 Is the art of *using* its language –
 Is the art of *talking* to the object of our enquiry (although this may at first sound strange, let us remember that stranger things are now happening in this life) –
 Is the art of penetrating from *within* –
 Is the art of *in-dwelling* in the other –
 Is the art of *imaginative hypothesis* which leads to the art of identification –
 Is the art of *transformation of one’s consciousness* so that it becomes part of the consciousness of the other.

Some of these requirements seem to be almost too much for our minds trained in the rigours of objectivity. Yet surprisingly, most of these attributes of the participatory research are not alien to us. We know them from our own personal experience. (pp. 160-161).

In using digital multi-media data as evidence in explanations of educational influences in learning in co-created knowledge, it is important to recognise limitations in solely printed-

text based representations in educational research and to overcome these limitations. These limitations, together with a multi-media text, that shows how to overcome them, has previously been published (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006a &b). Huxtable (2021) has also presented at ARNA 2021, an analysis of the importance of educational conversations in initiating Living Educational Theory Research.

Data Sources

The main sources of data are the data archives at <http://www.actionresearch.net> and <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ActionResearch/purpose/index.html> . The data sources include:

- i) Eight volumes of Passion in Professional Practice produced by teachers and advisers in the Grand Erie School Board in their continuing professional development programmes, supported financially by the School Board.

Passion in Professional Practice can be accessed from

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ActionResearch/passion/index.html>

- ii) The Masters and Doctoral Theses accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ActionResearch/theses/index.html>

These include:

[PhD: Jackie Delong: How Can I Improve My Practice As A Superintendent of Schools and Create My Own Living Educational Theory?](#)

[MEd: Geoff Suderman-Gladwell: The Ethics of Personal Subjective Narrative Research](#)

[MEd: Timothy Pugh: From Impostership to Authenticity: One Teacher's Journey Toward a C of Care.](#)

- iii) Published Work accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ActionResearch/pub_work/index.html

- iv) Papers accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>

These include:

Symposium presentations on 10th April at the 2021 Conference of the American Educational Research Association on Accepting Responsibility with Jacqueline Delong (Canada), Jack Whitehead (UK), Shivani Mishra (India), Michelle Vaughan (USA) and Parbati Dhungana (Nepal). Accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf>

- v) Living-posters accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>

- vi) Living Educational Theory Research doctorates accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>

- vii) The archive of the Educational Journal of Living Theories between 2008-2020, accessed from <https://ejolts.net/current>

These data sources include over 32 Living Educational Theory doctoral degrees supervised by Jack Whitehead to successful completion between 1996-2020 and a further 20 Living Educational Theory degrees that have been awarded at Universities around the world. The data sources are used to provide evidence in the results below of educational knowledge creation, preservation and access associated with a community of Living Educational Theory researchers. They data sources include access to over twelve years of publications in the Educational Journal of Living Theories between 2008-2020.

Results

The results include the evidence that the educational support in Living Educational Theory cultures of inquiry has influenced the co-creation of educational knowledge, preservation, access and the spreading educational influence of these cultures of inquiry of practitioner-researchers with values of human flourishing. This evidence has been most clearly presented in the symposium presentations on 10th April 2021 at the Conference of the American Educational Research Association on Accepting Responsibility with Jacqueline Delong (Canada), Jack Whitehead (UK), Shivani Mishra (India), Michelle Vaughan (USA) and Parbati Dhungana (Nepal). Accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf>

The results are analysed in terms of their contribution to the core principles of Community-Based Participatory Research as outlined by ARNA:

We are working on creating an experience to raise hope and provide inspiration. A conference that encourages peace, justice, respect, and creativity, and that strengthens the ties between people, communities, organizations, and projects.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) equitably involves community members, organizational representatives, and academic researchers in all aspects of the research process where all partners contribute expertise and share decision making and ownership.

The core principles of CBPR include:

- Empowering collaborative and equitable partnerships in all research phases as a power-sharing process.
- Recognizing community as a unit of identity. Facilitating co-learning and capacity building among all partners.
- Balancing research and action for the mutual benefit of all partners.
- Disseminating findings and knowledge gained to the broader community and involves all partners in the dissemination process.
- Promoting a long-term process and commitment to sustainability. (Accessed from <https://arnawebsite.org/puertavallarta2021-eng/>)

The finding, in the co-created knowledge and in empowering communities through Living Educational Theory Research, that is of particular relevance to the core principles of CBPR, concerns the necessary condition of a living-educational-theory. This condition is that it has

been tested in a validation group for its evidence-based validity and that it is made public in a way that is open to public criticism. The core principles of CBPR do not as yet include a process of community-based auditing or validation to test the validity of the evidence-based co-created knowledge with values of human flourishing.

Significance

The significance is in the values-based explanation of how Living Educational Theory cultures of inquiry are spreading the educational influences in learning of practitioner-researchers in Nepal, India, USA, Canada and the UK, through their community based participatory action research. The significance can be understood in relation to Maxwell's (2021) analysis of the distinction between knowledge-inquiry and wisdom-inquiry.

Maxwell's thesis is that Humanity is confronted by two great problems of learning. The first is learning about the universe, and about ourselves and others forms of life as a part of the universe. The second is learning how to create a genuinely civilized, enlightened, wise world... Now that we have solved the first great problem of learning, it is a matter of extreme urgency that we discover how to set about solving the second one.

Maxwell claims that the first problem was cracked, in essence, in the 17th Century, with the birth of modern science... (p.6). He acknowledges that modern science and technology have had profoundly beneficial consequences for humanity in that they have made possible the development of modern industry and agriculture, modern hygiene and medicine, modern travel, modern communications, and all the multitude of good things that come from these developments. But he says there is a downside:

These very successes have also led to all our current grave global problems. In every case, current global problems have been made possible by modern science and technology...we could have avoided generating these global problems if we had been wiser. (p. 7)

Maxwell points out that humanities failure to solve the second great problem of learning has put us into a situation of great danger. He says that we must learn how to acquire wisdom – social, political, economic wisdom – or we will end up destroying ourselves. The significance of co-creating knowledge, empowering communities through Living Educational Theory Research, in relation to the second great problem of learning, is that it is focused on individuals and communities holding each other to account for living values of human flourishing as fully as possible whilst generating and sharing living-educational-theories. Christine Jones has provided an example of how this is being done, in relation to empowerment, in her doctoral thesis (Jones, 2019).

The significance can also be appreciated in relation to the questions Budd Hall (2015) asked of himself whilst Co-Holder, UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

Some questions for myself

1. How do I 'decolonize', 'deracialise,' 'demasculinise' and 'degender' my inherited 'intellectual spaces?'

2. How do I support the opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic, and that have exercised dominance over (perhaps have even suffocated) intellectual and scholarly thought and writing?

3. How do I contribute to the building of new academic cultures and, more widely, new inclusive institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity – whether class, gender, national, linguistic, religious, sexual orientation, epistemological or methodological in nature?

4. How do I become a part of creating the new architecture of knowledge that allows co- construction of knowledge between intellectuals in academia and intellectuals located in community settings? (Hall, 2015, p.12)

Whilst asking such ‘I’ questions is a necessary condition of Living Educational Theory Research. It is also a necessary condition to research and answer such questions in the generation of an individual’s living-educational-theory.

Lupson and Hayes (2021) distinguish 5 great mistakes in education policy in terms of: Turning to the market; Letting test scores drive policy; over-prescribing teachers’ work; misunderstanding inequalities; Leaving education out of education policy making.

The significance of this present paper is that it highlights limitations in education policy that are related to the failure of education researchers to generate valid forms of educational theories that can explain the educational influences in the learning of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which their practice is located. This failure can be traced to the disciplines approach to educational theory that held that educational theory was constituted by the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology and history. This approach eliminated the explanations that practitioner-researchers generated to explain their educational influences in learning. The failure is at the heart of research in the American and British Educational Research Associations. Overcoming this failure, through legitimating the living-educational-theories of practitioner-researchers, is at the heart of co-creating knowledge and empowering communities through living educational theory research with values of human flourishing.

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