

Transforming practices in Higher Education through critical reflection

**HELTASA, Professional Learning Project (PLP) Webinar 14th July 2022
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Abstract

With the post-Covid -19 turn in higher education it is imperative that we pause and critically reflect on our educational practices in the last 27 months. My professional 'educational' perspective is focused on the generation and sharing of living-educational-theories with values of human flourishing as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning and as embodied, evaluative standards of judgment. A living-educational-theory is an individual's explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located (Whitehead, 1989). Such explanations help individuals to answer questions of the kind: 'How do you know that your practice has improved?'; 'What standards of judgement do you use to justify a claim that your practice has improved?' The approach rests on each individual's acceptance of their professional, educational responsibility, to ask, research and answer their question, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice in Higher Education with values of human flourishing?'. It is shown how transforming educational practices in Higher Education rests on each practitioner accepting their professional educational responsibility to subject their own practice to critical reflection. The critical reflection is focused on being accountable to improving practice and generating educational knowledge with using values of human flourishing. It involves generating and sharing one's own living-poster, creating and sharing one's own living-educational-theory and engaging critically and creatively with the living-educational-theories of others and their contributions to the Educational Journal of Living Theories.

Introduction

This presentation is focused on enhancing the professionalism of staff in Higher Education through researching one's own practice in questions of the kind 'How do I improve my educational influences in learning in my professional practice in Higher Education?' It is based on a view of professionalism that includes our educational responsibility as educators in Higher Education to research such questions and to contribute the educational knowledge we generate to the global knowledgebase of education.

I will illustrate how, in the process of developing and sharing your understanding, knowledge and practice of Living Educational Theory Research, you can help to transform practices in higher education through critical reflection with values of human flourishing.

'New' practices have been developed and 'old' practices have been set aside as we have struggled with the global challenges of the pandemic. As we start to emerge from the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic it is timely to critically reflect on what we have learned to help us transform practices in Higher Education with values, such as those of Ubuntu.

To begin I will show how creating a living-poster can help you to foreground your practices and context to critically reflect on with reference to communities of practice at North-West University, Nelson Mandela University and Cumbria University (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>). Then I will be encouraging you to: work with others to create your own Living Educational Theory communities of practice and to submit your living-posters for inclusion in the global homepage of posters; submit your papers to the Educational Journal of Living Educational Theories; submit your research papers to extend the ecologies of knowledges with Living Educational Theory Research.

I shall draw your attention to insights from my previous keynote to HELTASA in 2009 and the Inaugural Nelson Mandela lecture at Durban University of Technology in 2011 with the value of Ubuntu in living-educational-theories with values of human flourishing.

Then I will present some insights I have recently developed of transforming practices in higher education using Living Educational Theory Research. I will refer to presentations in 2022 on Community Based Educational Research (COMBER) to North-West University in South Africa; Researching Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to staff at Edge Hill University, UK; Researching your Educational Influences in Teaching and Learning to the SOLSTICE/CLT Conference at Edge Hill University; Critical Reflection in Educational Practice to the Network Educational Action Research Ireland; How can educational influences in learning be explained with insights from the disciplines of education? These presentations include a focus on the standards that can be used to evaluate improvements in practice and that can be used as explanatory principles in explaining educational influences in learning.

I shall now focus on the web-based resources that you can feely access and explain how they can support transforming practices in Higher Education through critical reflection

- 1) Contributing your Living-theory Poster - <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf> and using the living-educational-theory action-reflection planner at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arlivingtheoryplanner.pdf>
- 2) Contributing to the Educational Journal of Living Theories, 15(1) June 2022 - <https://ejolts.net/current>
- 3) Creating and contributing living-educational-theory doctorates to an ecology of knowledges - <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>
- 4) A keynote presentation at the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa 2009 on Risk and Resilience in Higher Education in Improving Practice and Generating Knowledge. <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwheltasakey09.pdf>

This address acknowledges the assertion of the conference organizers that we must participate fully in the knowledge explosion and a society of global interaction, by focusing on the following questions that we have been asked to address:

What risks do our students face, as they embark on the trajectory of higher education? In what ways is risk taking inherent to higher education? What risks face each of us, in our specific roles? How can we, and our students, learn to respond to risk with resilience?

Responses to these questions will be given from accounts, including my own, of how the enquiries of students in Higher Education from different cultural contexts can take sources of uncertainty into consideration during the generation of their own living educational theories (see <http://www.actionresearch.net/living.shtml>).

- 5) Notes for the Inaugural Mandela Day Lecture on the 18th July 2011 in Durban, South Africa, with a 63 minute video of the presentation.
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmandeladay2011.pdf>

Nelson Mandela is recognized globally as an individual who inspires tolerance and humanity. He is also a symbol for enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the future of humanity. To stress the importance of connecting directly to Nelson Mandela's life and work I am requesting that you view the 1:36 minute clip of Nelson Mandela talking about an Ubuntu way of being and submit your living-poster to share your practical activities in which you are seeking to live and Ubuntu way of being as fully as possible.

- 6) Using a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Enhance Community Based Educational Research (COMBER)
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jw01JuneGeneralMeeting.pdf>

Contributing to shifting architectures of knowledge through community university engagement and the future of higher education. See the UNESCO report at: <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ArchitecturesofKnowledge.pdf>

I am suggesting that contributions to shifting architectures must go beyond the rhetoric of researchers into shared valid, values and evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning in life enhancing work.

- 7) Researching Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: World Leading Educational Research at Edge Hill University.
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwedgehill270622.pdf>

This presentation is focused on enhancing the professionalism of staff in Higher Education through researching one's own practice in questions of the kind 'How do I improve my educational influences in learning in my professional practice in Higher

Education?’ It is based on a view of professionalism that includes our educational responsibility as educators in Higher Education to research such questions and to contribute the educational knowledge we generate to the global knowledgebase of education.

8) Researching your Educational Influences in Teaching and Learning.

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwedgehillabstractCLTsolstice.pdf>

This presentation is focused on enhancing the professionalism of educational practitioners as we ask, research and answer questions of the kind ‘How do I improve my educational practice’ It is based on a view of professionalism that includes our educational responsibility to research such questions and to contribute the educational knowledge we generate to the global knowledge-base of education as we engage in our own continuing professional development.

9) Critical Reflection in Educational Practice.

<http://www.eari.ie/2022/03/11/spring-nearmeet-2-april-2022-online/>

My focus on critical reflection in educational practice can also be understood as a response to the recent publication in Irish Educational Studies on ‘Exploring trans-generational and trans-institutional learning: educational action research possibilities in a virtual environment’ by Bernie Sullivan, Caitriona McDonagh, Cornelia Connolly, Máirín Glenn & Mary Roche (2022):

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...

The original contribution of this paper is the creation of an open and shared learning community to support action research practitioners in their processes of accessing, collaborating in and undertaking research. The significance of our paper is in the emergence of socially constructed knowledge in a fluid and flexible space that is underpinned by our lived values of inclusion and respect. (Sullivan et al., 2022, p.1)

10) How can educational influences in learning be explained with insights from the disciplines of education?

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwATEE230522.pdf>

The research aim is to demonstrate that explanations of the educational influences in learning, of educational practices, require the explanations of the practitioners themselves as well as insights from the Education Disciplines. The theoretical framework is Living Educational Theory Research. In this framework educational practitioners generate and test their evidence and values-based explanations of educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. Insights from

the theoretical frameworks of the disciplines of education are used in the generation and testing and an individual's living-educational-theory. The methodological design is based on methodological inventiveness in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' It draws insights from the methodologies of self-study, action research, narrative inquiry and autoethnography. It includes the use of digital visual data and empathetic resonance for clarifying and communicating the embodied expressions of the values that are used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The findings draw on over 50 accredited Living Educational Theory doctoral theses, accredited by Universities around the world, that draw insights from the disciplines of education, into their living-educational-theories. Resources are being developed particularly for people developing their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research at <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/>. I do hope that you will contribute to this website together with your living-poster and living-educational-theory as you seek to live as fully as you can values of human flourishing.