

The Institute of Education Research Groups are delighted to announce the launch of their combined seminar series.

The first event is entitled: *Living Educational Theory Research (LETR)* and will be presented by Professor Jack Whitehead. It takes place on Tuesday, October 21, 16:30–18:00 on St John's Campus (BY G199 – Binyon building).

Professor Whitehead is a former president of the British Educational Research Association and received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Worcester in 2023. His work centres on the development of a Living Educational Theory Research (LETR) approach to the international development of a Discipline of Education and the continued professional development of educators and educational practitioners. He has worked with the Institute of Education for many years. This session will explore the connection between LETR and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Summary

The session will focus on responding to the following extract from a poem by Stephen Bigger read out at the celebration service for his life on the 2nd May 2025:

In this spot, life goes on in a world that has lost its way.

The response will claim that an appropriate response to, and in, a world that has lost its way is to stimulate provocations in relating the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) of Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression, to the purposes of Living Educational Theory Research (LETR). In LETR each one of us accepts a responsibility for generating and sharing a valid, evidence-based and values-laden explanation of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located, with values of human flourishing. Such explanations are referred to as 'living-educational-theories' (Whitehead, 1989). Relating the purposes of LETR to the principles of UDL includes an **engagement** with questions of the kind, 'How do I Improve the educational influences of my professional practice with values of human flourishing?' The relationship includes the generation of an appropriate form of **representation** for explaining our educational influences. It includes **actions** that are focused on improving professional practice and making contributions to educational knowledge. It includes **expressing**, valid, evidence-based and values-laden explanations of educational influences of professional practice. The provocations are intended to clarify the educational values-laden purposes of Higher Education and our responsibilities as professional practitioners to contribute our living-educational-theories to realise the educational purposes of Higher Education with values of human flourishing.

Stephen Bigger's article (Bigger, 2021), in the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs), will serve as an introduction to Living Educational Theory Research. The Introduction and Conclusion to Bracken and Novak's (2019) book will serve as an introduction to Universal Design for Learning.

NOTES FOR THE SESSION

Relating the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) of Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression, to the principle of Living Educational Theory Research that individuals generate their own unique, valid, evidence-based and values-laden explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which their practice is located with values of human flourishing. The University of Worcester has a long tradition of supporting the principles of UDL in their research supervision.

Relating the purposes of LETR to the principles of UDL include an **engagement** with questions of the kind, ‘How do I Improve the educational influences of my professional practice with values of human flourishing?’ The relationship includes the generation of an appropriate form of **representation** (Eisner, for explaining educational influences in learning. It includes **actions** that are focused on improving professional practice and making contributions to educational knowledge. It includes **expressing**, valid, evidence-based and values-laden explanations of educational influences of professional practice.

The principles are used in the generation of each individual’s living-educational-theory, but do not constitute the unique explanation of educational influence in learning of each living-educational-theory. The explanatory principles of these explanations of educational influence include the unique constellation of values that each individual uses to evaluate their educational influences in learning and to explain these influences. The provocations are intended to focus on our responsibilities, in our professional developments, to clarify the educational values-laden purposes of Higher Education and our responsibilities as professional practitioners to contribute our living-educational-theories to realise the educational purposes of Higher Education with values of human flourishing.

In a Living Educational Theory Research perspective, individual and global values are included in a Collective Imaginary (Drewell, & Larsson 2019):

Generally, we simply cannot see the process of coming-into-being of our social reality. Yet, our collective ability to create social reality is perhaps our most defining human capacity. This social reality is sometimes termed our *Collective Imaginary*. This is the emergent property of the complex self-organisation of many minds with the capacity for symbolic language, and it is unique to human beings. (p. 64)

You can access recent contributions to a Collective Imaginary of Collective Agency with values of collective agency in:

The homepage of living-posters with guidance on their submission at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2025.pdf>

The submission guidelines of the Educational Journal of Living Theories at <https://ejolts.net/draft-publishing-checklist>

The Network, Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) – see <http://www.eari.ie/>

The Education for Development and Sustainability Living Educational Theory Research Group at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/eds24.pdf> .

The Indonesian TERG (Transformative Education Research Group working on their Living Educational Theory Research) – see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/indonesiangp23.pdf> .

Living Educational Theory Research: an evolving treasure chest of resources at <http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheory/>

My primary purpose today is to captivate your imaginations in a way that serves to encourage you to use the principles of UDL in the generation and sharing of your own unique living-educational-theory. On receiving my D.Litt. from the University of Worcester in 2023 I was aware of the tomb of King John 1st behind me. I was conscious of the historical importance of the Magna Carta of 1215 and the continuing importance on this site and in other global contexts of the struggle to live values of human flourishing, including democratic values, as fully as possible.



I am including below the Abstracts and Acknowledgements of the following doctorates, from Swaroop Rawal, Kirtee Bhosekar and Barnabe D'Sousa, awarded by the University of Worcester. The acknowledgements of Bhosekar and Rawal emphasise the history of support offered by the University for practitioner researchers who are expressing their principles of engagement, representation, action and forms of expression of their unique constellations of values. In addition to these Abstracts, I have included below those of Margaret Wadsley and Joy Mounter. These are my final two doctoral Living Educational Theory Research supervisions at the University of Cumbria in 2025. They highlight the importance of each individual holding

themselves to account for explaining their educational influences in learning to live values of human flourishing as fully as possible.

Dr. Swaroop Rawal (2006) - The Role Of Drama In Enhancing Life Skills in Children With Specific Learning Difficulties In A Mumbai School: My Reflective Account

<https://www.actionresearch.net/living/rawal.shtml>

Abstract

This thesis is a reflective account of an action research project set in a drama classroom. It is a multi-voiced patchwork text which is created and built imaginatively to represent my students and my experience in the drama classroom.

On one level it deals with the question 'How can drama be used to enhance life skills in children with specific learning disabilities studying in a school in Mumbai?' On the second level it is related to the question 'How can I improve my practice?'

This research is concerned with a teacher's capacity to recognise and realise the opportunity of an alternate reality in teaching. The reality of loving and caring for the students. The reality of an empathetic, compassionate, just and democratic classroom.

The foundation of this study was laid when I saw the children in need suffer due to insensitive teaching practices and uncooperative peers and family. I was concerned with the trauma faced by students in the prevalent educational setting in India. I believe that what I do in education should help make changes for the better in our society. Life skills enhancement, in my understanding, was a way to alleviate the stress the children experienced seeing that life skill education promotes mental well-being in young people and behavioural preparedness.

As a drama teacher I see drama as tool for education. It is a natural vehicle for explorative and experiential learning. The aim of my thesis is to describe and reflect on the learning process and the context in which it occurs. I present the critical points with close analysis of the choices made by me as I taught my pupils using drama as a learning medium. Additionally, this study investigates the influences of action research on my practice and the impact of engaging in the stages of action research which provided me with a methodical structure for implementing and analyzing the teaching and the learning process.

This defined structure guided me through systematic and conscious data collection, data analysis, and reflection. The data is composed of classroom observations and transcripts, a collection of the students and my work and interviews with their schoolteachers and parents. The main objective of this research was to enable a gain in positive behavioural intentions and improved psychosocial competence in children. This was accomplished through augmentation of creativity, emotional understanding and development, improved self-esteem and a notion of the joy of autonomy to enable the students to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

'You must be the change you wish to see in the world'
Mahatma Gandhi

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have played an important role in the process and creation of my dissertation I would like to express my sincere appreciation to them.

My Director of Studies, Dr. Philip Chambers, my Guruji, without whose help, advice, and encouragement I would have not been able to complete my study. Guruji stretched my thinking, expanded my ways of knowing and seeing. An Indian folklore suggests that one's Guru ensures protection such that even the wrath of the Gods are abated...I unequivocally thank Guruji for the security he provided all through my research.

Dr. Stephen Bigger and Dr. Yamini Suvarna, for their advice and support throughout this study. Significantly, I recognise that appreciation for their guidance cannot be expressed in merely a few words.

Dr. Tony Ghaye, for introducing me to reflective practice and action research and for his critical comments that have been valuable in seeing this research project become a reality. My critical friends, Dr. Nanette Smith, Dr. Jorunn Elidotir, Dr. Anjali Chabaria, Dr. H.L. Kalia and Dr. Harish Shetty provided on-going support throughout the process of this research. The continual dialogue with them, both through discussions and writing kept me reflecting and transforming as I examined my practice.

I would also like to express my genuine appreciation to my friends for their unending support Hema, for helping me organise my audiotapes, photographs and papers and locating them whenever I misplaced them.

Aarti and Sonal for lending a hand with my transcripts and helping me choreograph the annual day dance–drama.

I would like to express my immense gratitude to all these people, as well as to my family, my husband, Paresh and my sons, Anirudha and Aditya for their untiring support and patience. I thank my mother, Mrudula and father, Bachu for inculcating in me the belief that I could achieve anything that I set out to do in life.

Dr. Kirtee Bhosekar (2006) - In What Ways Might I Work Towards Improving My Work With Street Children In Mumbai Through Participatory Action Research (Par)?

ABSTRACT

This research is an illustration of a participatory action research (PAR) with street children with the key research question being, 'In what ways might I work towards improving my work with street children in Mumbai through participatory action research?' The empirical work for this thesis has been conducted in the challenging environment of the streets and a drop-in centre in Mumbai, India.

At the heart of this participatory action research process has been the ideological belief of ensuring that street children's own perspectives on their lives are taken into account while carrying out any work with them. Specifically, this research

demonstrates how a group of street children were encouraged to reflect on their day-to-day street experiences and talk about them through the use of a multi-method mosaic approach to different kinds of dialogue. As a result I have discovered how the street children became more confident to discuss their lived realities and the efforts they were capable of making in order to address their street-related concerns. I have been committed, as is evident throughout this thesis, to understanding, both, the principles and practices of participation, in difficult contexts. As a result, the driving force behind this research process is the idea of 'participation' and its translation into my practical work with street-living children. Closely aligned to this philosophy of participation, have been my personal and professional values, which have influenced this research.

The research is organised into a series of seven action-reflection cycles which have enabled me to cumulatively build insight and appreciation. This thesis, therefore, also tells the story of my developing insights on ways of engaging meaningfully with the street children and consequently, positions my 'living I' at the centre of this research process. My work in this thesis can be viewed in two parts based on the nature of actions within it. The research begins with my intentional action of learning about the culture and ethics of working sensitively with street children. Building on this, I have then implemented the idea of participation in my empirical work through the committed actions of using visual methods of drawings and photographs as prompts to develop meaningful dialogues with the street children. This thesis also documents the participatory process of using verbal methods of circle time group discussions and problem-posing "why-why?" and problem-solving "how-how?" methods with the street children. This study contributes to widening our understanding and knowledge about developing appropriate participatory approaches of working with street children. Analysis of this thesis puts forward fourteen evidence-based appreciations grounded in the lived realities of my practical research experience that focus upon the key processes of working systematically with street children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would have never seen light of the day, had it not been for the support and participation of the following people and I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for all of them by publicly saying a thank you.

To Dr. Philip Chambers, my wonderful Director of Studies for his guidance, words of encouragement, friendship and for a seven hour long tutorial on a flight from Birmingham to Mumbai!

To Dr. Nanette Smith, my second supervisor and a dear friend, for many things like her gentle steer and constructive feedback but most importantly for her consistent faith in my ability to complete this study, her patience, and for always putting my wellbeing first.

To Professor Tony Ghaye for offering me the research studentship, for his expertise, for the innumerable inspiring chats about PAR over cups of coffee but most of all for sharing a professional vision with me.

To Bill Kelly for being my critical friend during the initial stages of this study and for making me aware of the breadth of literature that was available.

To Dr. Stephen Bigger, who was involved within earlier research, for asking me difficult questions and consequently, helping me to expand my critical thinking and get out of my comfort zone.

Dr. Barnabe D'Souza, sdb (2008)- Changing Mindsets? Evolution Of A Rehabilitation Programme For Chemically Dependent Male Street Adolescents In A Major Indian City.
https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/512/1/Barnabe_DSouza_PhD.pdf

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1. Starting Out

I have worked in Mumbai supporting street boys since 1982 (full-time since 1986). This thesis began with the question, "How can we improve the educational experiences of the most vulnerable children in India?" Thus began a research journey in which I have systematically examined my practice, with my colleagues and with the vulnerable boys themselves. During the process, the operation has become more reflexive and self-sustaining. There is no magic for these boys, just a long painstaking process of support which has enabled some to turn their lives around.

As a practitioner researcher, my experience has prompted me to question the thinking and the mindsets of these male street adolescents and evaluate my practice. My account connects my personal experience to the cultural, placing myself within the social context of the street adolescent (Reed-Danahay, 1997). I wish to identify effective practice, and to share and develop this with colleagues on whom the future of the work depends. The phenomenon of street youth is a visible manifestation of a disrupted political and socioeconomic society. The forces that lead growing numbers of youth to the street are numerous and complex. In developing countries, few social services exist for the youth who have lived or worked on the streets. It is important to understand not only who these youth are but also how they function, as such insights will provide a better understanding of their needs which in turn will provide them with the opportunity to be included in decision-making processes pertinent to their future as contributing members of society (Tudoric'- Ghemo, 2005).

I wished to establish a programme (which would eventually be replicable all over the country), sponsored by my Roman Catholic order, the Don Bosco society. I sought a focused response to the plight of street children, their drug abuse, their street culture vis-à-vis their movement off the streets. The need to respond to their addiction was an obvious starting point: drug abuse was visible, harmful, leading to medical deterioration and helplessness...

The spiral of action research cycles follows a process of Action, Observation and Reflection to achieve greater understanding, followed by further action and reflection. Ascribing to the "living theory" approach of Jack Whitehead (2006), I tried to "improve

my practice” by engaging in cycles of action and reflection wherein I have created an action plan which enabled me to reflect and construct the values I live more fully. For my Reconnaissance phase, I draw on my records and experiences over the period 1986-97. This led me to my first cycle (1998-2005), the development and evaluation of the Therapeutic Community that led me to identify mindset-change as a central factor, which became my second cycle (2005-07).

Dr Margaret Wadsley (2025) - ‘Freeing Fictions with Compassion’: Improving my practice as a clinical supervisor through my living-educational-theory. Awarded by University of Cumbria.
<https://actionresearch.net/living/wadsleyphd2025.pdf>

Abstract

This research was designed to generate practitioner knowledge based on understanding, explaining and validating a process of mutual improvement within the supervisory relationship, which is at the heart of my practice. After a long career as an educator and therapist I integrated my Adlerian feminist approach with Living Educational Theory (LET) research to provide the methodology for this doctoral research. This thesis provides a values-based alternative to contemporary professional effectiveness research and expertise development models for evaluating and explaining practice improvement. ‘Freeing Fictions with Compassion’, the living-educational-theory that elucidated my explanation of mutual improvement within the supervisory relationship, forms a sound basis for on-going professional learning and development.

With the collaboration of supervisees I work with at relational-depth, I recorded 66 hours of supervision sessions. I also clarified a constellation of practice values during a detailed self-inquiry and devised a supervisee-led practice evaluation using Rich Pictures. The innovative assemblage of methods in my research design were compatible with the socially just principles of Adlerian Psychology and Living Educational Theory. Together they united LET’s tried and tested qualitative approach with reflexive explorations in the form of poetry, stories, artwork, Rich Pictures, Early Recollections, and creation of multimedia based elucidatory narratives. I also drew on Adlerian practice tools to support data collection and integrated Adlerian ideas about metaphor and embodied knowledge to support my data analysis. The research process enabled me to create new insights into Adler’s concept of the fictional final goal and the part it plays in unconsciously evoking defensiveness and impasse in professional relationships. The impact of this research reaches beyond clinical supervision to roles of a supervisory nature in a wide range of settings, for example, education, health, social care, and different supervisory contexts.

Dr. Joy Mounter (2025) - A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Professional Development in Education. Awarded by the University of Cumbria.
<https://www.actionresearch.net/living/2024MounterPhd.pdf>

Abstract

My research and thesis contribute to the field of the continuing professional development of educational practitioners. The originality of my thesis proposes Living Professionalism as a new professional, values-led Teacher Standard of professionalism, where educational practitioners accept educational responsibility for their own continuing, values-led, professional development. This includes teachers continually researching their practice to improve it, generating values-laden explanations of their educational influence in learning, contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase.

I draw on a Living Educational Theory Research methodological approach to continuing professional development in education. My thesis includes evidence of my reflections on the educational influences I have in my own learning, the learning of others and across social formations, as I accept educational responsibility for my Living Professionalism. I have critically engaged and analysed literature on Living Educational Theory Research, which revealed a limitation in the explanations of educational influences in learning across social formations. My explanatory principle of ~i~we~l~us~ relationships is proposed to highlight and transcend this weakness.

As part of values-led continuing professional development within Living Professionalism, and to overcome the identified limitation in Living Educational Theory Research, two new Living Educational Theory Research Master's degrees, have been validated during this research. These enable a given curriculum supporting educational practitioners to create their own living curriculum using Spirals and Living Interactive Posters as research methods, which have emerged in my Living Educational Theory Research.

An illustrative representation of the relational dynamic between my original contributions within Living Professionalism is offered as my Keystone Diagram, holding the practitioner and values-led practice at the centre.

In the process of my research, I have clarified my living values, drawing on these as my explanatory principles and standards, by which I judge improvement in my practice, and evaluate the validity of my contributions to knowledge.

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Returning to the extract from a poem by Stephen Bigger read out at the celebration service for his life on the 2nd May 2025:

In this spot, life goes on in a world that has lost its way.

Stephen's life, together with living colleagues at the University of Worcester continues to enhance the flow of values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity, in the face of events that negate these values. Because of such events I imagine that each one of us recognizes the experience of being living-contradictions in the sense of holding certain values whilst at the same time experiencing difficulties in relation to living these values as fully as possible. If you find yourself, asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my educational influences in my professional practice?', I do hope that you experience some inspiration in the living-educational-theories of those I have drawn attention to. I also hope that

you feel some inspiration in motivating your share your own living-educational-theories as you seek to live your unique constellation of values of human flourishing as fully as possible.

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Additional Reading

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