

## **How are we contributing to positive social change through CBR?**

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### **Abstract**

Our research question is grounded within communities of educational researchers who are generating and sharing their explanations of educational influence in learning with values of human flourishing. We refer to these values-based explanations as living-educational-theories that are generated within the research paradigm of Living Educational Theory Research. Living these values as fully as we can provides our focus for positive social change. We use a process of community-based audit to enhance the validity of our evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning. In researching our contributions to positive social change, we also focus on our systemic educational influence in learning to answer criticism that our explanations are merely subjective and anecdotal. We provide evidence that connects positive social change through CBR to global communities of practitioners with intercultural values that recognise and value individual differences within global communities without masking conflicts that require resolution when differences emerge between values.

### **Introduction**

Our question, 'How are we contributing to positive social change through Community-based Educational Research?', is grounded in our practical research activities within communities of professional practitioner educational researchers as we seek to improve and explain how we are enhancing our systemic influence of values of human flourishing. This explanation is grounded in Living Educational Theory Research in which individual's generate and make public their explanations of educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations.

In clarifying our meanings of positive social change through community-based educational research we will clarify what we mean by positive social change and by community-based educational research. We will then provide an evidence-based explanation of how we are contributing to positive social change through community-based educational research. In this presentation we will clarify the importance of 'i~we' relationships (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016), which are equitable relationships with values of human flourishing in communities.

We clarify the values that have emerged through our research, which form explanatory principles in our explanations of our educational influences in our learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. We will also clarify our approach to community-based educational research, which draws on Tattersall's (2007) community-based auditing.

### **Living Educational Theory Research and creating accounts of living-educational-theory research.**

Living Educational Theory Research is a research paradigm in which a practitioner-researcher explores the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?'. It involves the researcher generating and making public an explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which they are researching. The explanatory principles used in Living Educational Theory Research are values-laden and grounded in values of human flourishing. Each individual practitioner-researcher has their own unique constellation of values that they use to explain the meaning and purpose of their life. These values influence their practice. As the practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research, they clarify the values they are embodying in their practice and those they want to be held to account to as explanatory principles in their explanations of their educational influences in learning. As they do so they identify where they experience themselves as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989) and find ways to resolve the tension to improve their contribution to positive social change. 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 and those from different research paradigms that helps them improve their practice and research. Where no appropriate methods are available, they try to create their own (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2015). 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 living-educational-theory research. These values are included as explanatory principles in multimedia narratives to explain educational influences in learning. 'Living-posters' has been developed over a number of years by Huxtable to enable educational-practitioner researchers to gather together and share information about their values-led research and connect with like-minded practitioners. (See <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf> for examples) Some practitioner-researchers have produced a number of living-posters over time. They have analysed the data to identify changes in their efforts to contribute to bringing about a positive social change in social formations, in order to learn from what they have done to improve what they are doing to bring into being a world in which humanity flourishes.

Living Educational Theory Researchers draw insights from a range of theories from other disciplines and paradigms that help them to create their own evidence-based and valid, explanations of educational influences in learning in validation groups of some 3-8 peers to both help to strengthen the validity of their explanations and to take forward the research. Validation involves questions such as those derived from Habermas (1976, pp 2-3):

- 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?
- How can I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in showing that I am living my values as fully as possible?

An example of this process can be found in the account by Kok (1991) when working on her MEd assignment 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.

### **Positive social change.**

We focus on the positive social changes of educational influences in learning. We understand 'education' to be a life-long values-laden process of learning to live a satisfying, productive, worthwhile life for self and others. Whilst not all social changes are positive, we claim that educational changes are all positive because they are grounded in learning with values of human flourishing. We think of positive social changes as social changes that contribute to the flourishing of humane values and the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation that transcends time and place. 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 the research account. We therefore stress the importance of validation groups that support the mutual rational control of critical discussion (Popper, 1975, p. 75). 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 grounded in an agreement between peers that the force of a better argument, rather than the power of position, will govern them.

## **Community-based educational research included community-based auditing.**

Through focusing on our community-based educational research we are emphasising the importance of communities working together to enhance positive social changes from a global perspective to bring into being a world in which humanitarian values can flourish.

Here are some of the communities of educational researchers within which our practical research activities are grounded:

- The community creating and publishing The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs). EJOLTs publishes values-led research for systemic change, and which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity. See <https://ejolts.net/about> and the archive of publications at <https://ejolts.net/archive>. See the EJOLTs living-poster group page for an introduction to the community from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/ejoltsgrp21.pdf>
- The University of Cumbria research community, researching into their professional educational practice to improve it and publishing the results of their research to impact on local, national and international policy and practice. See the homepage of living-posters group page accessible from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/uocgp21.pdf>
- The Bath and West Cooperative Party educational policy development and implementation group doing politics differently. See the values of the international cooperative alliance below at <https://www.co-op.ac.uk/co-operative-values-and-principles>

Other examples of organisations which provide a supportive context for professional practitioner-researchers to engage in educational research: The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST); The Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI); The Educational Studies Association of Ireland, The Special Interest Group of ESAI on Values-based Practitioner Research (VPAR); The International Professional Development Association (IPDA); The Association of Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE).

To strengthen the validity of our explanations of our educational influences in contributing to positive social change we draw on Tattsersall's idea of community based auditing:

Community Based Auditing (CBA) 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. In that sense, CBA should be seen as 'work in progress'. (Tattersall, 2007, p. 32)

### **Explaining positive social change through community-based educational research.**

One explanation of positive social change, through community-based educational research is that of Eden Charles (2007). You can access this at: <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/edenphd.shtml> . Charles focuses on the community-based value of Ubuntu in his research question: How Can I Bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard of Judgement Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition.

Charles' living-educational-theory thesis, traces his engagement in seeking answers to his question, 'how I can improve my practice as someone seeking to make a transformational contribution to the position of people of African origin'. In the course of his enquiry he recognises and embraces Ubuntu, as part of an African cosmology, both as his living practice and as a living standard of judgement for his thesis. Charles generates two original ideas of 'guiltless recognition' and 'societal reidentification' to move away from severing, colonising thought, towards ways of being that open up new possibilities for people of African origin and for humanity generally. He explains his educational influence in creating and sustaining the Sankofa Learning Centre, a community-based Centre, for Black young people in London.

### **Using 'i~we' relationships as relationally dynamic, values-laden explanatory principles.**

Practitioner researchers engaged in Living Educational Theory Research accept responsibility for what they are doing. The 'self-study' is not a study of their private self but of their 'I' as a practitioner seeking to understand and improve their values-led professional practice and generate valid explanations for what they are doing. Their accounts include their analysis of data to enable them to identify and develop the embodied values to which they hold themselves to account, identify where they are a living-contradiction and develop strategies to improve matters and put to their peers for challenge, support and to test the validity of their claims to be contributing to human flourishing. When you look at the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' it is important to recognise that the 'I' exists within a network of social and environmental influences and community practices that affect the meaning of 'I'. What might be lost, in looking at the 'I' in the question, is the relational dynamic of the value. We stress the importance of recognising the relationally dynamic nature of the value of human flourishing in 'i~we' (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006a & b) relationships through the use of the tilda ~ between the 'i' and the 'we'. Each has a responsibility to contribute to and benefit the relationship and to help others to do so too. Lower case is used to indicate that neither individual nor collective is

subordinated to the other. We use the value of these relationships as an explanatory principle in explanations of educational influences in learning. There is an increasing global awareness that human and other species are under threat by global warming. Tackling this, as well as other world crises, requires an ecology of mind that includes the relational dynamic of 'i~we' relationships which include our values of human flourishing.

Mounter (Mounter et al., 2019) has developed this further, which she communicates in the form of ~i~we~I~us~. She uses the ~ with a different meaning to that of Whitehead and Huxtable (2006a & b) and Huxtable (2012).

### **Values of human flourishing.**

Our values of human flourishing include the recognition that human flourishing is dependent upon many non-human influences. For example, global warming is now a threat to the continuing existence of human and other species. Whilst this warming has been influenced by the carbon dioxide emissions from industrialization, it is leading to the possible catastrophic effects of releasing methane gas from the thawing permafrost and the ocean floor.

Brown, (2021), working with teams of researchers, have given their evidence-based conclusions that as global citizens we are faced with seven major global problems we must address: global health; climate change and environmental damage; nuclear proliferation; global financial instability; the humanitarian crisis and global poverty; the barriers to education and opportunity; and global inequality and its biggest manifestation, global tax havens.

In answering our question 'How are we contributing to positive social change through CBR?' we are holding ourselves to account for living our co-operative values as fully as possible. These are the values at the heart of our understanding of human flourishing and are consistent with the co-operative values of the International Co-operative Alliance at:

<https://www.co-op.ac.uk/co-operative-values-and-principles>

These values are named as:

- Self-help
- Self-responsibility
- Democracy
- Equality
- Equity
- Solidarity
- Honesty
- Openness
- Social responsibility
- Caring for others

## **The global significance of contributing to positive social change through Community Based, Living Educational Theory Research**

In answering our question, 'How are we contributing to positive social change through CBR?' we have emphasised the importance of generating and sharing living-educational-theories in which values of human flourishing for values-laden explanatory principles. At the heart of this approach are individuals who, like us, accept their responsibilities for living the values of human flourishing as fully as possible. We not only accept personal responsibility for living these values as fully as possible, we also accept our professional responsibility as educators, to explore the implications of asking, researching and answering our question, 'How are we improving our professional practices in living our values of human flourishing as fully as possible?' In researching this question, we are generating and sharing our contribution to the global professional knowledgebase of education in our living-educational-theories. We recognise that our systemic influence in spreading the global influence of Living Educational Theory Research rests upon many others, like yourselves, being convinced of the worthwhileness of engaging in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' and to contributing the educational knowledge they are generating to the global knowledgebase of education.

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