

Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in a UK/global context.

A contribution to a symposium presentation on 'Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in Global Contexts' at the April 2021 Conference of the American Educational Research Association on 'Accepting Responsibility' with Jack Whitehead, Jacqueline Delong, Parbati Dhungana, Michelle Vaughn and myself (Shivani Mishra) Director, Department of Social Work, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat

Abstract :-

The objective of the paper is to show how a Living Educational Theory research approach to action research can upscale the quality of education in preschool through life skill education in a rural village of Gujarat, India. In this paper, I exemplify my classroom practice and generate a living educational theory as I explore the implications of asking, researching and answering the questions, "How do I improve my practice? How do I improve what I am doing? How do I enhance the process of education with the help of modules of Life Skill Education?" The methods used are those developed by Rawal (2012; 2020) in life-skills education. The research described in this contribution provides evidence on how preschool education in rural India is imparted through ICDS, which has emerged as the most extensive program for early childhood development in India. Whilst ICDS is lagging in imparting quality education to preschool children this presentation provides evidence on how this quality can be improved.

The results include evidence of learning from a 72 hour programme of training in Life Skills Education to understand and to teach it. The results include an evidence-based explanation of how I link my practice with theory and theory with practice. They include an explanation of my learning taking a risk and realising how risk-taking is an important aspect of creative thinking in the generation of a living-educational-theory. The scientific significance is in showing how children's behavior can be transformed from being very submissive, fearing to talk, fearing to act and being reserved in class participation. The transformation is focused on developing a trust relationship with the help of listening, communication and activity-based techniques such as games, drawing and screening films between my children and me. Children open up and became participative.

Introduction :-

I am primarily a researcher and this underpinned my decision to accept the position of research coordinator at Sardar Patel University. This was my first job in the field of social

work in the year 2001. The best part of the job was that I could research and also practice it through fieldwork. The first project which I was assigned to carry out was an intervention based research on adolescent sexuality which was funded by the Government of India and University of Maryland, USA.

It was a daunting task for me to carry out an intervention program on sex education as these adolescents hailed from the rural belt where the culture does not permit them to talk on the sensitive issues such as sex education. I prepared the lesson which was entirely based on sex education and behavioural communication. The project was professed to be highly successful as research findings met our objective which was to impart the sex education to school going adolescents. However, something in me made me ask the question “Does this project really work towards the adolescents’ holistic development? Or is this project created solely to meet the needs of funding agencies?”

The mission of the project was to impart sex education but there was no concern about the holistic development of adolescents. The lessons which I imparted were about biological and sexual development making no references to moral and social development. I believed that the missing holistic development did not empower the adolescents to become self-reliant and responsible.

I felt that project was related to ‘research on people’ (Bang, 2013) There was no power in the hands of the adolescents about their development. I should have asked “what do they think about sexuality? How and what they want to learn?”

I felt that there was an absence of research democracy in the project. A Research democracy is where people get the power for decision-making, voice their opinions, experience, liberties, equality, justice, inclusion and sense of ownership. In my project I did not give a chance to adolescents’ to voice their opinion. The adolescent did not have a chance to choose what they wanted to learn in my class. I taught the sex education model to adolescent as per my need and did not take care of adolescent needs.

Around that time I was delegated to evaluate the social work curriculum at the national level organised by the Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai. I observed that in many schools of social work there was no scope of self-directed learning or independent social work practice. Moreover, through discussion at the forum I learned that as educators we do not

involve students in their own learning and as a result students' stop taking responsibilities for their development and are reliant on the teachers.

I was reminded of the word 'epistemicide' coined by Santos (2016) in which he suggested that due to the dominant epistemology of the universities we kill the students' voice in the curriculum, that is meant for their development. In the meeting I observed we, as social work educators, gave too much importance to theory, fieldwork hours and credits. We did not consider the students predicament and did not try to understand how they would cope in a curriculum-centered environment where there is no space for them to share ideas and grow.

This reminds me of the observation of Santos (2007) that 'in the realm of knowledge we have created an intellectual abyss, which hinders human progresses'. Sadly, I too encouraged an 'act of dispossession' (Tandon and Hall, 2007) where students have no chance to associate with their curriculum and dispossess them from ownership of their ideas. I recalled the days when I was studying social work, I often questioned my teachers as to why we were following a curriculum which did not allow us to express our ideas. I believed that higher education must emphasize on learning rather than only teaching. It has to prepare students to be mature and self-directed. In the self-directed learning process the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator. The social work educators should create an enabling environment for students to design their field work and action project with minimum supervision. Such process enable students how to practice skill in the field of social work. My quest for self directed learning motivated me to ask to question to 'How do I improve the process of social work education?'

Ray of Hope

I heard of a person called Swaroop Rawal and that she worked in Life Skill Education (LSE) . I then read her article "Making Magic" (Rawal,2014). In her article she mentioned the relevance of social work education and the challenges of social work practitioners. This gave me an idea that she has some experience in social work and I was looking to incorporate a LSE in social work. Through her discussion I understood that a good LSE curriculum should be values and intervention based. She agreed to run the program at Sardar Patel University, where I was the Head of the Department of Social Work studies and enabled me to carry out Life Skill Education program in my university. I was excited that hopefully I am in position to fill the gap I found in social work education.

My first meeting with her was like 'life affirming energy' (Whitehead, 1989) for me as I was struggling for the last 16 years to fill the gap in which social work pedagogy did not facilitate the students to practice independently in the social work field. The guided fieldwork practice was so centric that it adversely impacted on student's learning. We, social work educators make students dependent on us and consequently students cannot work on self-directed learning. The Life skills curriculum was like a ray of hope for me through which I looked forward to enabling my students to become the independent social work practitioners.

Living my living-theory

Before introducing life skills and field action projects in the social work curriculum, I adopted a democratic process in my class. I had several meetings with my students and wanted to know their opinion on it. Education in social work enabled me to construct values such as trust, respect, acceptance, social justice, democracy and equality. These are the 'energy-flowing values' (Campbell Delong, Griffin, and Whitehead, 2013 p.3). Unknowingly, I had practiced my one of the values democracy in my class. I wanted my students to make their decisions in their own learning and not to impose myself on the students; indeed I want to become voice of the students so that they can speak with their own voices.

To develop the trust and confidence of the social work students, I assured them that I would also undergo life skills training and follow the fieldwork process too. This task was so challenging for me. First, in addition to my teaching and administrative work, I had to join with the students and undergo training along with them. Second, I had never worked with preschool children since I have great amount of experience to work with only students from higher education. Hence I have no idea how to deal and manage preschool children. Last but not least, I have to carry out field action projects with students and also on a monthly basis I have to present my field progress work in front of the students. These challenges I am able to work upon on the base of the question that I asked myself when I thought to change the field curriculum of the students and they are "How do I improve the process of social work education ?

These values were at theoretical level, I learned but I did not know how to put them in practice. Working with preschool children was a challenging task for me as these children were hailing from Rural belt of Anand district. My one value of equality education has encouraged me to work for the children who belong to the rural background. However, values which I learned in my social work education were not reflected in my intervention. The training on life skill education and mentorship of Swaroop Rawal enabled me to take

risk and work on such project. Here my living-educational-theory was developed. Life skills training influenced me to work on the field action project and my learning had influenced preschool children to enhance their learning and thereby developed the social formation of the rural school and my university.

Explanation of my work on living theory action research in AERA structure Purpose and Aim; Perspective; Methods; Data Sources; Results; Significance.

Purpose and Aim

The objective is to show how a Living Educational Theory research approach to action research can upscale the quality of education in preschool through Life skills education in a rural village of Gujarat, India.

Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is a creation of The Ministry of Women and Child Development whose responsibility is early childhood education. The six basic services are offered by ICDS includes health and nutrition education, health-checkups, preschool, non-formal education, immunization, and referral services. Looking at the current practice of the centre of ICDS, it is found that they are lagging behind in preschool education. The draft of National Educational Policy 2019 acknowledges, 'A major part of learning crisis appears to be occurring well before children even entered Grade 1'and clearly indicates that neglecting preschool education has multiple adverse effects later in an individual's life .Based on the work of Canadian , Dr Fraser Mustard:

Early childhood education benefits children, families, and society. This additional investment in ECE would:

- Improve educational outcomes such as higher graduation rates and less need for special education
- Prepare children for the 21st century workplace by promoting language and thinking skills, as well as physical, social, and emotional well-being
- Stimulate the economy and address workforce shortages
- Reduce gender and income inequality for women
- Increase social equity for marginalized children
- Boost maternal labour force participation
- Promote diversity.

High quality early childhood programs can have long term positive consequences for children, especially children from economically disadvantaged background (Burger, 2010,).

Heckman (2012) suggested that every child needs effective early childhood supports and 'at-risk' children from disadvantaged environment are least likely to get them. They come from families who lack the education, social and economic resources to provide for the early developmental stimulation that is so helpful for success in school, college, career, and life. The World Development Report 2018 stated that education is the best way to pull out from economic misery especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged. But providing education is not enough. What is important, and what generates a real return on investment, is learning and acquiring skills. This is what truly builds human capital. Without learning, students will be locked into lives of poverty and exclusion, and the children whom societies fail the most are those most in need of a good education to succeed in life. Learning conditions are almost always much worse for the disadvantaged, and so are learning outcomes. Rawal (2018) mentioned that :

'Learning crisis is widening social gaps instead of narrowing them. Children from economically vulnerable backgrounds, social minorities and girls, who are already disadvantaged by their circumstances, reach young adulthood lacking in the most basic life skills" (p.72).

Life Skill enhancements help 'at risk' children and enable them to build their psycho-social competencies. Further, the barriers to quality of education, such as social and gender inequality and exclusion would be addressed through life skill education. Thus, it is called "inclusive education" and it is meant for all sections of the society.

I had selected Aaganwadi centre, (Figure 1) of very small and sparsely populated village called Ravipura in Anand district, Gujarat. The village has a population of 1460 and with a total andwith a total number of houses is 301. The majority of the population belongs to Other Backward Class and the dominant community is Thakor. The total literacy rate as per Census 2011 (reference) is 65.8 % . The sex ratio as per 2011 census, is there are 957 females per 1000 male in village. Of the preschools (in ICDS Policy it mentioned the Aaganwad) in village, one is government aid and another is private-owned. The villagers have been battling two major issues which are barriers to their development - child marriages and addiction to alcohol.



Figure 1 : Preschool of Ravipura village- Aaganwadi Centre

The prime aim of my action study was to describe the contributing role of life skills education in enhancing the quality of education of preschool children of Ravipura village of Gujarat. In the preschool, I found that the syllabus of early child care was very robust. However, when I asked the students about their learning they were not able to answer my questions. I found a gap between children's learning and teacher's teaching in the preschool children.

Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

The main perspective is that early childhood is a critical stage of development as it directly influences the social, economic and health of people and society. In the early years there is a rapid development of the brain, which duly impacts on health, behaviour, and learning of children. Preschool education in Rural India is imparted through the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). In this paper, I exemplify my classroom practice and generate a living educational theory as I explore the implications of asking, researching and answering the questions, "How do I improve my practice? How do I improve what I am doing? How I do enhance the process of education with the help of modules of life skill education?"

My aim is to empower preschool children to create knowledge for themselves so that the quality of education would improve and also creating knowledge for myself so that my educational practice will improve. Using a process of action research, the energy and values

are formed into the living standards, that individuals use to account to themselves and others in creating a world of educational quality'.(Whitehead, 2007 cited in Llyod,2009).

The learning relationship between children and educator plays a significant role in children's life, especially in rural areas where children have a lack of opportunities and dearth of quality education. My educational influences as an educator has immensely benefited to myself and the children.

My practice was initiated by my values (Rawal, 2017). My educational values I were informed by our Constitution of India, Article 45 & 14

Right to early childhood care and education to all children until they complete the age of six years" and 'Right to Equality'.

But my educational values were negated in my practice (Whitehead, 2013). I presumed that children from rural backgrounds are unable to work and participate in life skills enhancement program. Further, I assumed that the life skills education module is successful in preschool in urban areas where children are having more exposure in comparison to children from rural areas. Whitehead and McNiff (2006) suggest that we can often be a "living contradiction", if we do not experience the living out of our values in our practice. I am using Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 1989) methodology in my research which makes the "I" central to my research. Here "I" as a living contradiction as I value equality in education for preschool children however, my educational values were negated in my practice seeing that I assumed that the exposure of life skills education to rural children would be meaningless, as I believed only children from the urban background could acquire life skills competently. I held that the rural children would be unable to acquire any skills effectively. **My query I had discussed with my mentor and that became**

Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry

The methods used are those developed by Rawal (2012; 2020) in life-skills education. Rawal uses a Living Educational Theory research approach to integrate life-skills education, within social work programmes in Higher Education in an Indian Context. Following method was adopted for the life skills training program. The students and I also shared reflection after each cycle. Cycle 1 is followed by Cycle 2, and this will continue up to Cycle 4. I had to strictly follow the cyclic model for life skill education because, after each cycle, I had to share reflections of my preschool work. Such a reflective process gave me an

understanding about the success and failure of learning goals which I defined and constructed for myself. Thus, it gave a way to enrich the learning process.

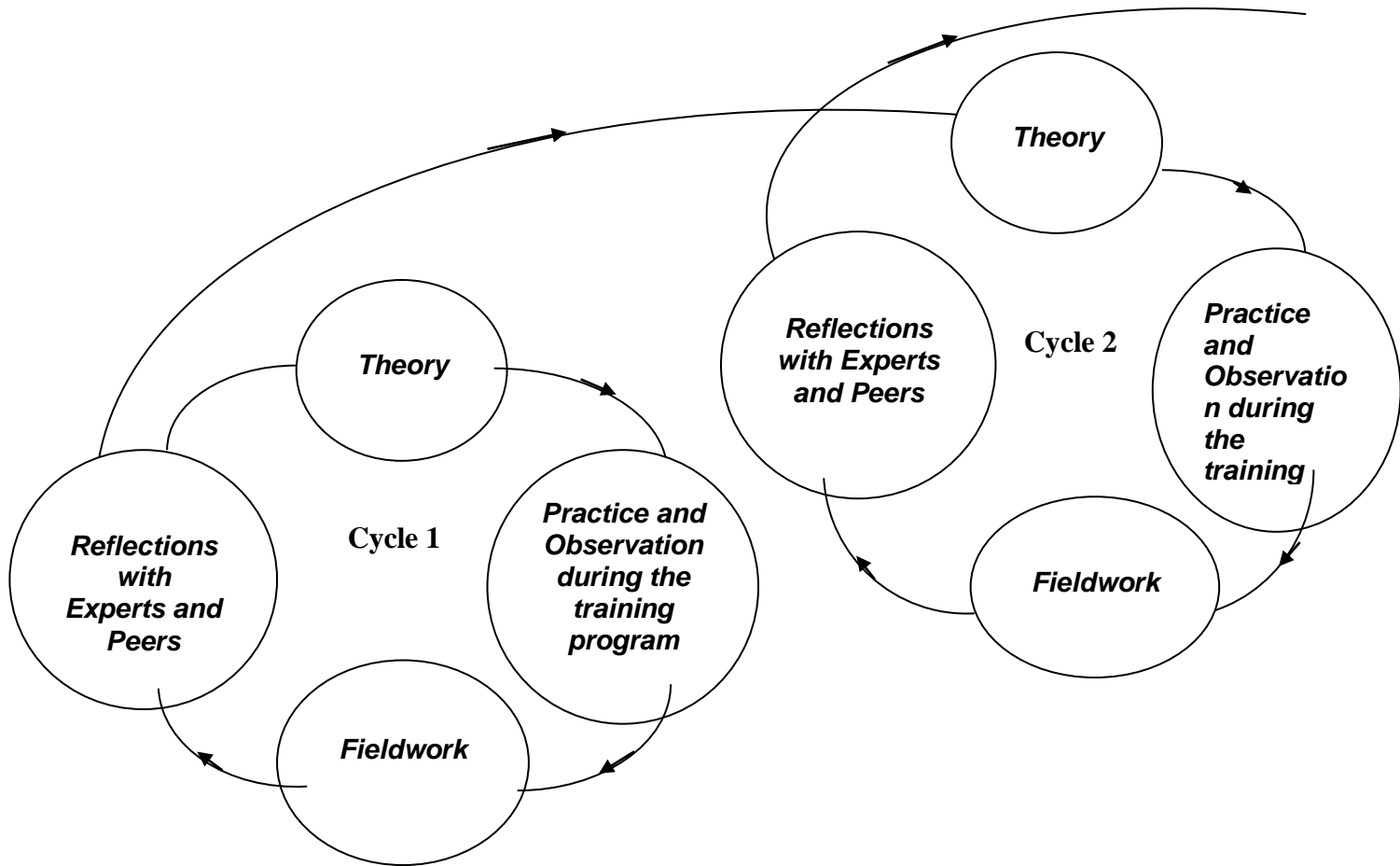


Figure:2 Prabhavasali Vikas Vocational Model

Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials

The data sources include the Integrated Child Development Scheme- (ICDS) welfare service for children in India. This is the world's largest community based program and was launched on 2 October 1975. The research described in this contribution provides evidence on how preschool education in rural India is imparted through ICDS, which has emerged as the most extensive program for early childhood development in India. Whilst ICDS is lagging in imparting quality education to preschool children this presentation provides evidence on how this quality can be improved. A key piece of data source is photographs of activities conducted with preschool children, videos clips, and personal communication.

Results

It was my first day and first interaction working with children. I experienced that children's behaviour was very submissive; they were afraid to talk, to act and were reluctant to participate in the class activities (Figure 3). The first interaction of preschool children rang an alarm in my mind that this problematic issue needs to be work upon.



Figure 3: Confusion and Fear on Children Face when I interacted with them

I developed a trusting relationship between me and my children with the help of listening, communication and activity based techniques such as games, drawing, screening the film and drama. Due to the life skills training children were ready to learn and acquire knowledge related to their curriculum too.



Figure 4 : Teaching children about Alphabet

My ontological values enable me to define my educational commitment and to have a deep connection with preschool children. Learning for preschool children is a self transforming process for me and I was committed to enhancing the quality of education for children of Ravipura village. Each individual has a voice and if that voice is respected he or she will become a stakeholder in the self transforming process. This process is the best example of 'inclusionality' (Whitehead 2008).

The democratic evaluation is a process where I can establish my validity and encourage people to accept my claims. I worked on two processes to claim my knowledge and they are self validation and peer validation.

Self Validation

The first evidence is through the personal validation. I am working as a university educator and it was a risk for me to teach preschool children as I have never had an experience to teach little children. I experienced the living contradiction but after engaging in action research and developing my living-educational-theory I had improved the quality of my practice. When I lived my values in my practice I observed that I found a change in the preschool children's behavior. I liked the idea put forward by Polanyi (1958) that development is a transformational process (cited in McNiff, 2014, p.83). My living contradiction did not permit me to open my mind for preschool children but the understanding of self encourages me to appreciate as well as encourage others to transform their lives. While dealing with children I realized the role of teachers in their lives. My educational inquiry (McNiff,1993) enabled me to break out of my dogmatic view (for example only urban children easily learn and acquire knowledge) and establish a more informed and caring view. Action research is a foundation for me to enhance my professional practice. 'My research took place in a 'real' classroom of 'real' children. The realities of my classroom practice cannot be answered by educational theories made outside my classroom as sometimes the theories are not specific enough, or the propositions they contain are not easily generalisable to [my] teaching situations'(Hopkins, 1993 cited in Rawal 2006). Need quotation marks around quote

I established a normative judgment: for example, the role of the teacher is to educate; it is a duty of a student to learn on their own. But I realized that I had made a false assumption, which I borrowed from my higher education teachers, when I developed a dialectical relationship with children. The activities which I carried out in preschool were on the basis of children's feedback. I never preplanned my activities nor did I prepare my lecture plan and

thus I lived my value of democracy in action. Lather (1991) suggested the concept of 'ironic validity' i.e. explaining how your critical self has stood to one side of your researcher self, so that you are able to comment critically on your present thinking and action (McNiff&Whitedhead 2004,p. 108)

Peer Validation

The second validity in my research study is that of peer briefing (Rawal, 2006). Here the validation is done by mentor Dr. Swaroop Rawal (henceforth refereed Swaroop Madam) to and my former student who is now a colleague, Sunil. Moreover I had presented my research paper at British Educational Conference in July 2019, and received validation from Professor Jack Whitehead through email correspondence.

My colleague and I held a validation meeting December, 2019. Sunil is my fellow action researcher. He is the one who is constantly providing insights and offering feedback to me.

Sunil: I think it is worthy decision to carry out a triangulation.

Me: Yes we learned the role of parents and teachers in quality of education of children.

Sunil: The questionnaire we prepared in advance helped to carry out the conversations. Parents and Teachers both shared freely with us about their problems

Me: I learned that only appropriate questions had open up the conversations.

Sunil: I found that in your class the children are comfortable and feel free whereas when you taught us madam we found your class atmosphere autocratic.

Me: This I learned from life skills training and also learned to understand my values of democracy and respect and these values are now my standards of judgment.

Me: Initially, children were not ready to come and attendance of them is very low. The life skill training program encouraged them to be in preschool.

Me: I feel happy when student enjoyed in our class. I learned that once your understand yourself and other, you can flourish the humanity.

Sunil: I learned that children enjoyed in the class because there were not preplanned activities were decided. The activities were carried out purely on children's feedback.

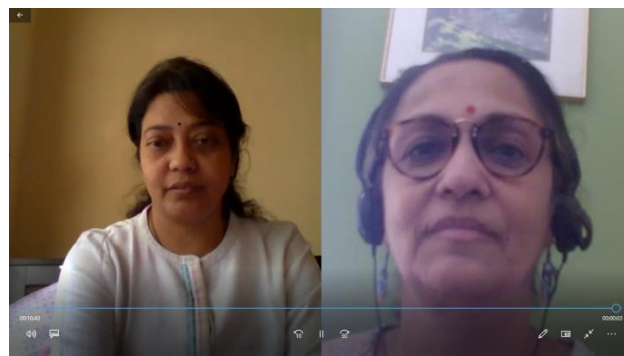
Me: Yes this is one a very reasonable evident for us.

(Sunil.at.al. personal communication 11th January, 2019)

These conversations explicated the validation by my colleagues. I and my colleague together visited the village and met the children. For all the activities which I carried out I got

critical feedback from him. This feedback enabled me to work more on my epistemological values. When my colleague shared about the class environment in Post Graduate and Preschool class. I was reminded of Nugent (2000 cited in McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.118)) who found a caring approach in classrooms encouraged learning more effectively than a more structured disciplinarian approach. She explains how her modified attitudes towards her children manifested as new practices that also set new precedents for organizational practice

Findings of this paper indicated that how I accepted the Educational Responsibility and Building Living Theory Culture of Educational Inquiry in Global Contexts. My culture of inquiry(Delong, 2015) where I welcomed the climate of trust of preschool children and validation by my colleagues, my mentor Swaroop Madam and my guru Prof Jack. From the first day of my class, I ensure that children should feel valued in my classroom. As a result of this children are regular and eagerly waiting for me in the morning. I never planned my lesson or activities indeed all my class was inquiry based teaching and due to I found the active engagement of students in my class. The validation of my statements was captured in the conversation with my mentor Swaroop Madam. The learning relationship with Swaroop Madam had a profound influence on me as a learner. She enabled me to realise that as an authentic leader in organisation I should be transparent in all those relations whom I lead (Gardner, 2011).



Shivani sharing her work on preschool with her mentor Swaroop Rawal

<https://youtu.be/zplA5ouSCP0>

To share my valuable learning I did my presentation at University of Worcester a jointly organized with British Educational Association Research in month of June 2019 in the conference on Global Perspectives: Re-imagining Education. My research paper entitled 'An action research on up scaling quality of education in preschool through life skill education in

Ravipura Village of Gujarat, India'. Prof Jack Whitehead gave a feedback on my research work .

Dear Shivani Mishra,

I enjoyed very much your presentation at the Global Perspectives Conference at the University of Worcester, yesterday (21st June) on 'An action research on upscaling quality of education in preschool through life skill education in Ravipura village of Gujarat.' I particularly liked the way you integrated your Living Educational Theory research into your account as well as the educational influence of your relationship with Swaroop at Sardar Patel University. I'm presenting at a conference in Montreal next week of the Action Research Network of the Americas and would like to refer to your presentation. Would you please send me a copy of your powerpoint slides and your paper for me to refer to. When I get back from Montreal on the 3rd July I'd like very much to continue a conversation with you about your ideas and the work you are doing. Love Jack.

(Whitehead.at.al. personal communication,22nd June, 2019)

Significance

It is necessary to provide answers to questions asked by the organizers of the annual 2021 AERA conference and answering these question shows significance of the scholarly work.

1. How can we individually and collectively demonstrate greater care about what happens in our society and in educational institutions?
2. What evidence and expertise can we bring?
3. How can we unite with practitioners, with scholars across other academic fields and disciplines, and with other citizens beyond academia to strategically address complex social and educational problems?

How can we individually and collectively demonstrate greater care about what happens in our society and in educational institutions?

Jackie Delong, a person who helped me to work on to understand my culture of inquiry. It is democratic process we have worked on to have more understanding of the theory as well as thoughts.

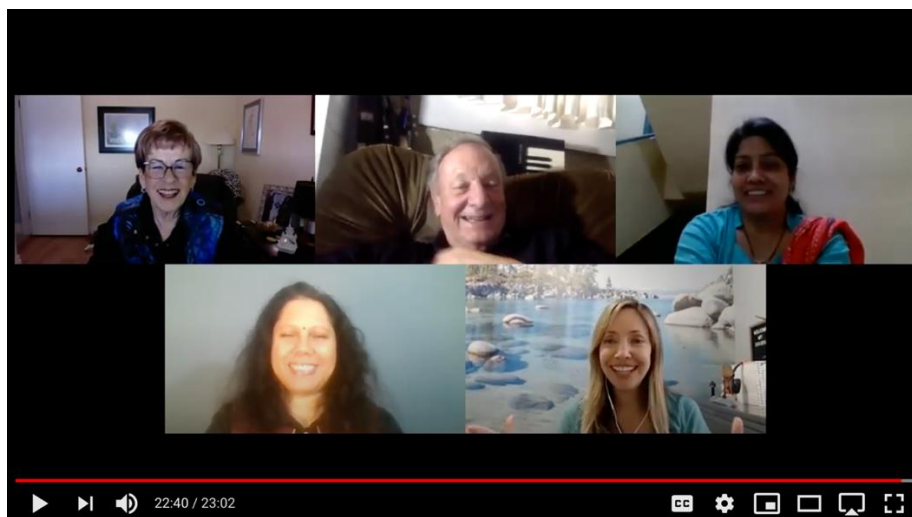


Shivani discussing with Jackie about Culture of Inquiry and Educational Responsibilities.

<https://youtu.be/s47x1LA5No0>

How can we unite with practitioners, with scholars across other academic fields and disciplines, and with other citizens beyond academia to strategically address complex social and educational problems?

A collective effort of all group members from UK, Canada, USA, Nepal and India helps to understand each other an educational responsibility and sharing values and its practice empowering and influencing common educational values for flourishing the humanity.



Planning for 2021aera Symposium on the 08-02-21

https://youtu.be/SG3k3qc_0hY

What are the values that are we bringing into our culture of inquiry?

The common value found in all scholars who are from different part of the world is humanity. This humanity is energy-flowing values which brought all the scholars on one platform. Jack Whitehead had worked extensively work on educational values and build up Living theory of Educational Inquiry in United Kingdom as well as global context. Jacquie DeLong value such as 'being loved' is energy flowing values. Michelle Vaughana shared her values of connection, care, being an activist scholar and global citizen, in creating sustainable living theory cultures of educational inquiry. Parbati Dhungana shared the values in her satvic framework, in our symposium, that are used as explanatory principles in the expression of her educational responsibility.

Scholars across the country are working on the value of educational responsibility and brought this value in their culture of inquiry.

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