

How do I contribute to cultivating equitable education systems for the 21st Century through Living Educational Theory, Action Research, Cultures of Inquiry in a Canadian/global context?

A presentation in the 2022 AERA Symposium on 'Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century in global contexts through Living Educational Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry'.

Jacqueline Delong, International Mentor

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to explain how Living Educational Theory, Action Research and Cultures of Inquiry can contribute to cultivating equitable education systems for the 21st century in a Canadian/global context. The theoretical perspectives of Living Educational Theory, Action Research and Cultures of Inquiry include insights from understandings of equitable learning spaces, wisdom-inquiry, de-colonization, ecology of knowledges and knowledge democracy in creating alternatives to inequities, epistemicide, colonization and the dominance of the English language. The method, a pedagogy of a culture of inquiry used in this presentation includes: creating a space, a culture of inquiry, where individuals have comfort and agency to use their knowledge-creating capacities to improve their own and others' learning. They transform their educational values into educational standards of practice and judgement in the creation of their own living-educational-theories.

Practitioners taking responsibility for their own professional development based on their values and their exploration of the question, 'How can I improve my teaching?' with the encouragement and support of a culture of inquiry is the core of my research as a superintendent of education, as a university professor, and as a mentor of international practitioner-researchers. My values, while dynamic and in flux, include loved into learning, cultures of inquiry and democracy/equity.

This creative space, culture of inquiry, is examined and assessed for its efficacy within our family/community of Living Educational Theory researchers cultivating equitable education systems from our dialogue and research in this 2022 symposium and continuing from the research presented in a symposium at AERA 2021 on 'Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in Global Contexts.' (Delong, et al., 2021).

1. Introduction

I begin with the socio-historical-cultural context for the paper. This family/community creating a culture of inquiry consists of Michelle Vaughan, Florida Atlantic University, USA, Swaroop Rawal, Sadar Patel University, India, Jacqueline Delong, International Mentor, Canada, Parbati Dhungana, Katmandu University, Nepal and Jack Whitehead, Cumbria University, UK. In our

second consecutive symposium for AERA (DeLong, et al., 2021), we have built a culture of inquiry as a commitment to equitable school systems for our own context and for our students.



From left to right: Michelle Vaughan, Swaroop Rawal, Jacqueline Delong, Parbati Dhungana and Jack Whitehead from the planning meeting of 29/11/21

Within our AERA symposium group, we have created a ‘culture of inquiry’ (DeLong, 2002) that is living and continuing to emerge from our early meetings in 2019 as our dialogue, our loving educational conversations, includes clarification of values, of colonization, of inequities and barriers, of ‘loved into learning’ (Campbell, 2019), of hope and connections and authenticity. This dialogue in a culture of inquiry continues as we prepare for our second AERA symposium ‘Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century in global contexts through Living Educational Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry’. Breaking down this research theme includes equity in education systems, global contexts, Living Educational Theory research, and cultures of inquiry. I will begin with ‘cultures of inquiry’.

In my thesis (DeLong, 2002), I unveiled what I thought was a prerequisite space, a Culture of Inquiry, for educators to influence themselves, others and social formations. This Culture of Inquiry space is an environment, a ‘*practice architecture*’ (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014) for giving voice to practitioners. I frequently exhort them not to allow others to speak for them, to represent their embodied knowledge for and by themselves. I invite them into a Culture of Inquiry, a culture of love and support and encouragement, to unveil their embodied knowledge and create their own living-educational-theories.

A Culture of Inquiry (italics to indicate recent changes) includes:

- Creating a safe, *democratic, equitable* and supportive space
- Building relationships based on ‘loving them into learning’ (Campbell, 2019)
- Creating an environment that supports self-determined learning
- Embracing and supporting vulnerability, *including democratic evaluation*
- Valuing and unveiling embodied knowledge
- Expressing life-affirming energy and contributing to human flourishing.

Our culture of inquiry includes: Said’s (1993, p. xiv) idea that culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought; Lorde’s on power relationships and the dominant/subordinate model between unequals; Maxwell’s (2021, p. 51) distinction between knowledge-inquiry and wisdom-inquiry in creating ‘rational problem solving’ in ‘*cooperatively rational ways*’; de Santos’ (2014) analysis of epistemicide in relation to establishing equitable education systems, Bhattacharya’s (2021) ideas on colonizing academic practices and McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead’s (1996) and Wood et al.’s (2007) self-study action research processes.

To assess our progress in creating this space, and if we assume that the miracle has taken place, we need to consider: what aspects are already happening? what does it look like for each of us? and what steps are still needed? I agree with Mellett,

From the researcher's 'point of view', the aim of their research is to analyse a situation in order to understand it better and then to disseminate this new understanding for others to share, as they seek to improve the quality of their own practice. From the practitioner's perspective, the aim of the research is to make use of fresh insights in effecting changes within their own context (Mellett, 2022).

To share these 'fresh insights', this paper follows the structure of the successful proposal for presentation at AERA 2022: methods, techniques and modes of inquiry; data sources; evidence and materials; results; and significance.

2. Methods, techniques, and modes of inquiry

The research evaluates the effectiveness of our actions and explanations for our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations shared in a validation group of 3-8 peers using Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity:

- i) How could I enhance the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- ii) How could I strengthen the evidence I use in my explanation of educational influence in learning?
- iii) How could I deepen and extend my understandings of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in my practice and understandings?
- iv) How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in showing that I am living my values as fully as possible.

We intend to test the validity of our claims made in the presentation and ask participants in the symposium to join us in this purpose.

We draw insights from various methodologies such as action research, narrative and self-study and focus on the processes of Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 1989) while creating our own living-educational-theory methodologies. Reason and Torbert (2001) make the connection between action research, reflection, and human flourishing:

since all human persons are participating actors in their world, the purpose of inquiry is not simply or even primarily to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field, to deconstruct taken-for-granted realities, or even to develop emancipatory theory, but rather to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes *directly* to the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part (p. 5).

The methods include the use of dialogue as research method (DeLong, 2020) and digital visual data with visual narratives to develop a shared understanding of the relational values inherent in creating equitable school systems and learning, enhancing equity and creating cultures of inquiry, safe, democratic spaces for human flourishing. Dialogue as research is essential to my way of being:

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. (Lorde, 2007, p. 40)

The modes of inquiry draw insights from: auto-ethnography stressing the importance of cultural influences, particularly, Eastern; action research with action-reflection cycles; narrative in constructing a valid, evidence-based story; self-study including 'I' within the research question. I find action research works in its democratic capacity, as Wood et al. (2007) state:

Action research abolishes the traditional power relationships between researcher and those being researched and replaces them with a more equal partnership where both parties challenge and support each other in a mutual quest to improve their work (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005:22). It allows educators to be "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988:1), who critique their own practice and try to create theories which are more in tune with accepted transformative values (p. 72).

In addition, the Action Research tutorial page: <https://www.actionresearchtutorials.org/3-resources>, directs action researchers to Jack Whitehead's resources:

A. Examining Values Vs. Practice & Community

---Jack Whitehead has written extensively about action research and specifically how values can be used to help determine one's research question. He provides the following questions to help think about values: [Value Searching Ideas](#)

where his videos and writings are shared at 'Living Values, Improving Practice Cooperatively' <http://www.spanglefish.com/livingvaluesimprovingpracticecooperatively/index.asp>

As I endeavour to understand my own praxis, I continue to assess whether I am adhering to my values, while in flux and dynamic, which include loved into learning, cultures of inquiry and democracy/equity as a *dynamic constellation*:

The author's understanding of his own praxis – as a fusion of knowing, doing and being – is explored, leading to an extension of the role of values as explanatory principles for living-educational-theory research accounts. Rather than a fixed structure, an individual's values are envisaged as a *dynamic constellation* that is in a state of flux; values within the constellation adjust their relationships with each other over time to fit changing contexts (Mellett, 2022a).

3. Data sources, evidence and materials

In collecting the data for this ‘wisdom inquiry’, ‘to create a genuinely civilized, enlightened, wise world’ (Maxwell, 2021, p. 43), we are intending to address real problems of the world like living according to values of True North principles (Covey, 1989) to improve inequities, to love students into learning (Campbell, 2019), to make a safe, comfortable, democratic and equitable culture of inquiry for those in our sphere of influence. Maxwell says,

Wisdom-inquiry has, as its basic intellectual-social aim, to seek and promote wisdom, understood to be the capacity, active endeavor and desire to realise what is of value in life for oneself and others, thus including knowledge, technological know-how and understanding, but much else besides. (p. 43)

He advises addressing the most serious crises of the world from climate change to threats to democracy through ‘rational problem solving’ in ‘*cooperatively rational ways*’ (p. 51). I would add to his campaign to transform universities, a campaign to invest in early childhood, the early years from birth to 6, in order to improve global social, health, education, economic and social outcomes. (McCain & Mustard, 2002)

To assess whether ‘the miracle’ is actually happening in action-reflection cycles, I asked the AERA group three questions about our culture of inquiry: What aspects are already happening? What does it look like for each of us? What steps are still needed?

Answers to these questions are emerging in our dialogue and visual data:



AERA2022Culture of Inquiry 170122
<https://youtu.be/MbR2s6nWLZU>

Swaroop (3:00): So, I was telling you I was feeling guilty and really feeling bad that you're all writing and I'm not and it's not that I can't do it but it's so much work and then when I meet y'all, I feel so good. I feel I just feel so comfortable with you and especially the way Jackie you're leading ... so I want to say I love this. It's just giving me more and more ideas to be writing.

Michelle (07:26): I think, Jackie, what I hear is when we would talk about teachers differentiating their teaching (or various folks they work with), you're talkIng about differentiating your practIce within the culture of inquIry. There isn't just a standard one, two, three, four; it becomes stronger with differentiation and with the multiple perspectives of members. It becomes richer so it's almost like 'the messier it gets; the better it gets'.

Parbati (11:00): I also noted down few of the things like gender-responsive pedagogy and culture-responsive approaches of dealing with the students. And what I feel regarding the culture of inquiry is it's like a warm space because I feel it's a very safe, open, cozy, loving, caring and supportive environment; I feel I am able to be vulnerable and share and I can easily say I'm not able to write and at the same time I feel I need some challenges, to challenge the status quo because I feel at times I feel I'm pampered.

What steps are still needed? What I felt is I need to have some exploration of the socio-cultural meaning of the value of equality and equity so I may explore the colonial perspective of equality and equity. At times, I sense when values are life affirming and energy-flowing, living values to the fullest is a kind of enhancing energy. From the socio-cultural perspective, energy lies in Chakras and seemingly equality means to balance energies and chakra. I need to explore more on it.

The data that provides evidence of claims to know our values, living those values, and using those values as explanatory principle to explain our influence on ourselves and others also resides in the process of 'empathetic resonance' (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016). The dialogue of our meeting of Monday 17th January 2022 included information from Swaroop Rawal about her activities in influencing school curricula within an Indian context with her understandings of life-skills education and value of equity. Parbati Dhungana made explicit in the dialogue her intentions for her research on gender-responsive pedagogy and culture-responsive approaches of dealing with the students, and mentioned the Eastern idea of Chakras in relation to a focus on a flow of life-affirming energy in the relationships between us:



24:42 minute video at <https://youtu.be/MbR2s6nWLZU>

The shared expressions in this still image captures this moment around this focus at 21:01 minutes; it clarifies and communicates our meanings of a flow of life-affirming energy and evidence that 'the miracle' of our culture of inquiry has arrived. Empathetic resonance is used to clarify and communicate the meanings of a flow of life-affirming energy that flows through and

is evident in the pleasure of preparing for this 2022 AERA Symposium. This flow of life-affirming energy is accompanied by each individual's unique constellation of values that are expressed as values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity by moving a cursor backwards and forwards along a digital video and pausing at the moment of greatest resonance. Each individual's presentation to the symposium provides evidence of their value of equity as a value of human flourishing.

Bhattacharya (2021) helped me focus on being vigilant with regard to colonizing practices:

Giving up the will to know (Bhattacharya, 2009b, 2019a) in favor of entering the research space as a humble learner is a prerequisite for de/colonial relational ethics. (Bhattacharya, 2021, p. 11)

De/colonizing approaches in educational research require constant vigilance regarding colonizing onto epistemologies as they influence various spaces of inquiry, including positionality, relationship building, and conceptualizations of data. (p. 13)

4. Results

Let's start with the assessment of our AERA 2022 culture of inquiry by addressing the questions: What aspects are already happening? What does it look like for each of us? What steps are still needed?

After Jack sent the above example of empathetic resonance, the following emails on Jan23/22 showed evidence of the desired aspects:

Parbati: The image that you captured was perfectly fine as my smile is evidence of my value of equity (and harmony) as a value of human flourishing. I think we are conducting a participatory, collaborative, or cooperative inquiry to develop equitable strategies to improve what we have been doing which is enhancing our life-affirming energies. Within our community of "culture of inquiry" we have been getting a loving, caring, and respectful learning environment. According to the Eastern Wisdom Traditions, which includes Yogic knowledge traditions of South East Asia, 'love, care, and respect' (I understand them as my living value, "living love") are connected to the Heart Chakra. As the heart lies at the center of the body, we are activating our Heart Chakra by 'living love' and thereby influencing all the remaining 6 Chakras of our body.

Michelle: I agree with Parbati that the moments you capture truly embody the feelings of the "loving, caring, and respectful learning environment" that has been organically (perhaps purposefully?) created through this work. While we are each working on our own lines of inquiry within this culture of inquiry, I believe our intentional love and support for one another shine through in these images. Thank you for sharing, it brought a smile to my face!

Jackie: I agree with Parbati and Michelle. I experience that flow of life-affirming energy in our culture of inquiry every time we meet. I see in my visual expression and in the expressions of each of us the pleasure of being together and our purposeful work together to do our part to improve our lives and positively influence the world around us in our contexts, our social formations.

For the data to answer the question, ‘What steps are still needed?’, I reflect that a face-to-face meeting would certainly help to deepen our loving relationships once the pandemic is over:

We are making the future as well as bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present, and that is what it means to be part of history. (Lorde, 2007, p. 144)

*If we win
There is no telling
we seek beyond history
For a new and more possible meeting.* (Lorde, 2007, p. 123).

We all feel that we need to continue to become more conscious of inequitable practices in ourselves, in others and in our social formations.

The results include the evidence-based, values-based generation of educational knowledge that is grounded in accepting educational responsibility, active citizenship and cultures of inquiry (Whitehead, 2013; DeLong, 2013). They include a Living Educational Theory approach to continuing professional development (DeLong, 2021) and with Dhungana’s work, the integration of Sanskrit images and post-gender metaphors for understanding power balance/imbalance:



In our culture, Ardhanarishwar is considered an all-inclusive and balanced metaphor (Dhungana, 2020; Mishra, 2017) (see Figure 1). Ardhanarishwar, a Sanskrit word, refers

to the union of the Hindu god Shiv and the goddess Parvati. Moreover, Ardhanarishwar is the metaphor of the “receptive, all-inclusive, holistic, integrated, self-sustained and balanced form of dialogic inquiry” (Dhungana, 2020, p. 52). The image itself shows our inherent male and female qualities metaphorically. With this reference, Ardhanarishwar seems a post-gender metaphor. (Dhungana, et al., 2021, p. 74)

The results seem to provide evidence that

Conveying a more authentic understanding of what people typically value has potentially transformative consequences: people who hold truer perspectives of others’ values report deeper connection to their communities, show greater motivation to become civically engaged, are more likely to support action on social or environmental challenges, and have higher wellbeing. <https://valuesandframes.org/about-us>

They also show that a culture of inquiry is a unique experience for each individual in their context and within the relational dynamic of the space and includes ‘a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought’ (Said, 1993, p. xiv).. Through these action research cycles, I have amended my definition of culture of inquiry:

A Culture of Inquiry (*italics to indicate recent changes*) includes:

- Creating a safe, *democratic, equitable* and supportive space
- Building relationships based on ‘loved into learning’ (Campbell, 2019)
- Creating an environment that supports self-determined learning
- Embracing and supporting vulnerability, *including democratic evaluation*
- Valuing and unveiling embodied knowledge and *the Eastern Wisdom Tradition*
- Expressing life-affirming energy and contributing to human flourishing.

Significance

In the work of our AERA 2022 international culture of inquiry, we each are making our individual contribution to human flourishing with each other in this culture of inquiry and in each of our local contexts. We intend to encourage and support each other, Jack in his Living Educational Theory research groups from Bath to Malaysia to Ireland and publications; Swaroop in her 75 Life Skills workshops across India and her work emphasizing values in the national curriculum, Michelle in her quest to reduce inequities experienced by her Master’s students by being more accessible to them, Parvati as she encourages her Masters students to write in Hindi and Sanskrit as well as English in order to reduce an inequitable educational system and, me, (Jackie) in my mentoring, increasing awareness of my blindness to inequities imposed through Western ways and language creating epistemicide (Santos, 2014) and my intention to find the light:

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It

is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. (Lorde, 2007, p. 36)

The scientific significance is also in our evidence-based explanation of our contribution to a living culture of educational inquiry, not only to a new epistemology of educational practice (Whitehead, 2013) but also how we are being educationally responsible in researching questions like 'How do I, individually or in cooperation with others, enhance the difference Living Educational Theory research can make in a culture of inquiry concerned with extending equity in human flourishing?' (DeLong, et al. 2021)

We are making the future as well as bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present, and that is what it means to be part of history. (Lorde, 2007, p. 144)

In our regular Monday morning meeting on March 14, 2022, we discussed the significance of our research and arrived at the conclusion that our learning about inequitable educational systems was a unique approach: from our international culture of inquiry, we had learned that inequities have formed because of the dominance of the English language and Western views of education, research and learning, omitting Eastern Wisdom and ways of knowing. To that end, we have learned to take time and pay attention that we are being inclusive and recognizing and encouraging other languages and ways of knowing not as add-ons but as endemic to knowledge-creation. We have learned as teachers that we must listen to the students and amend our ways of teaching and communicating to include all the voices and ways of knowing.



AERA 2022 Symposium planning meeting - 14th March 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOFzJox8nKU&t=106s>

For my own part, both Parbati and Swaroop have taught me to attend to and open my mind to the relational and spiritual nature of Eastern Wisdom. Tradition. Dhungana (2021) writes, “According to the Eastern Wisdom Tradition, unlike tamasic (ignorant) and rajasic (passionate) people, satvic (good) people work for the common good.” When I expressed my concern about the impositional nature of my Western ways of seeing and knowing, Parbati wrote (email March 21, 2022):

Jackie, you shared that you were logical. I think you are logical as you bring evidence to support your claim, discuss, and come to the conclusion. Besides the logical way of making sense, you have an intuitive way of making sense. You are open and inclusive. Throughout your paper, I can see my voice including Michelle, Jack, and Swaroop. I think it was possible in the state of withdrawing your logical mind. According to Krishnamurti, it was the withdrawal of the logical mind. It was an EWT way of making sense through observation which opposes logical analysis. According to Krishnamurti, we cannot perceive reality through logical analysis.

It is my hope that you sense our love in our work in this Living Educational Theories Culture of Educational Inquiry and wish to join us to be loved into learning in our Loving Learning Conference as Zuber-Skerritt (2017), expresses it:

... I have argued that we need to shift away from the mindset of neoliberalism and reductionism dominating our present society and driving its obsession with consumerism, power and control. Instead we need a collaborative, participative and inclusive paradigm built on love and working through local and global action to connect us with each other as human beings and with nature. Society needs to be renewed by making a shift from the negative energy of fear, competition, control and war to the positive energy of faith, love, hope and creativity. Clearly, we need to conceptualize and practice not just learning conferences but Loving Learning Conferences. (p. 224).

In conclusion, as Michelle says of our culture of inquiry, “I believe our intentional love and support for one another shine through in these images.” and Parbati says it is there that we connect “to the Heart Chakra”. I hope that you, dear reader, will join our culture of inquiry!

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