Educational Research and Knowledge Creation: Mechanisms for Social Transformation?

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Abstract

I am researching the question, 'How do I contribute to the flourishing of emancipating, egalitarian and inclusive educational relationships and communities?' to understand, improve and explain my practice with the hope of creating knowledge that contributes to the flourishing of a co-operative, humane society in a sustaining, diverse global ecology.

In developing my living-educational-theory methodology I draw insights from various practitioner-research and theoretical-research methodologies and methods, for instance those of Action Research, Narrative Enquiry and Auto-Ethnography. I also critically and creatively engage with knowledge created in various fields of practice, such as Education, Business and Health, and disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy.

For this paper I draw on data collected during and between two international events. The first event was a CARN study day/Pre Conference workshop organised by the Bath (UK) based 'Conversation Café' in preparation for the 1st Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy, 2017, organised by ARNA. The second was organised to contribute to preparations for the ARNA 2019 conference. Both events included people physically in Bath and those living and working in countries around the world. They were brought into the gathering in Bath through SKYPE and/or their 'living-posters' (accessible from http://www.actionresearch.net/). People were therefore able to contribute irrespective of their locality or technology. The data, comprising video and SKYPE recordings, emails, reflections and reports collected before, during and after the events are analysed with respect to my research question and its purpose. (Ethical permissions are of course sought for use of data where necessary).

Introduction

Through this paper I intend to explore and answer my question, "Educational Research and Knowledge Creation: Mechanisms for Social Transformation?" with respect to the conference theme of, 'From Action Research to Activism'.

There are many definitions of activism but for the purposes of this paper this one will suffice, "Activism: a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/activism). I am not saying that vigorous action to support or oppose one side or another is

not necessary at times. I would, literally, not be here today if others had not engaged in such vigorous action. However, getting better at, "sharing, discussing and improving collective efforts to understand, make visible, dismantle, resist, upset, undo, re-write, subvert, and change the conditions of contemporary social life that create and sustain inequalities" (http://arnawebsite.org/call-for-proposals/) is not enough to change conditions for the flourishing of humanity. When I talk about the flourishing of humanity I am referring to the flourishing of my humanity, your humanity, our collective humanity and the flourishing of Humanity as our species that exists within a complex, diverse relationally dynamic ecology that constitutes our planet. It is reassuring to find others, such as Zuber-Skerritt (2017), express a similar sentiment:

> … 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).

I can find evidence of activism leading to alliances being forged around a common issue and even societies being re-formed. However, I want to learn what actions transform societies not simply re-form them and I want to help spread that knowledge influentially. Taleb (2010) said:

> You need a story to displace a story. Metaphors and stories are far more potent (alas) than ideas; they are also easier to remember and more fun to read. If I have to go after what I call the narrative disciplines, my best tool is a narrative.
>
> Ideas come and go, stories stay.' (p.xxi)

So, I want to offer you a story of Living Theory research as a form of educational research and knowledge creation that can, "… enliven a conversation about knowledge and education as mechanisms for social transformation". As I write this story I do so with a desire to communicate to you something that is important to me with the hope that as you read you might bring into being new thoughts and ideas that might contribute to further transforming stories of social transformation.

Stories are created by authors in the process of writing and by readers in the process of reading. Each story contains the stories of many people and many ideas, each continually evolving through a creative, multidimensional, relationally dynamic process within complex socio historical and cultural context and equally complex intra, inter, and extra personal contexts. The story I offer in this paper is focussed by my research question, 'How do I contribute to the flourishing of emancipating, egalitarian and inclusive educational relationships and communities?' to understand, improve and explain my practice with the hope of creating knowledge that contributes to the flourishing of a co-operative, humane society in a sustaining, diverse global ecology. I am aware you engage with what I have written through the lenses of your own important questions and stories of which I know nothing but I believe you share with me a vision of bringing into being a more emancipating, egalitarian and inclusive society. So, I

hope, by using language, words and metaphors and various forms of representation to evoke deep frames (Lakoff, 2004) of humane ways of being that are consistent with relational values, 'compassionate' values (http://www.valuesandframes.org), of an emancipation, egalitarian and inclusive society.

I begin by briefly clarifying what I mean by 'educational research and knowledge creation' as a precursor to clarifying what distinguishes Living Theory research and an individual's living-educational-theory methodology. I draw on published and accredited accounts of living-theories to illustrate how Living Theorist integrate insights from various practitioner-research and theoretical-research methodologies and methods, for instance those of Action Research, Narrative Enquiry and Auto-Ethnography. I also illustrate how Living Theory researchers critically and creatively engage with knowledge created in various fields of practice, such as Education, Business and Health, and disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy.

I then illustrate the nature of the knowledge created and the data analysed by the Living Theory researcher to help them understand and improve their practice and create valid accounts of their explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in. I do so by drawing on data collected during and between two international events to illustrate how Living Theory research, as educational research in action, provides a mechanism for social transformation. The first event was a CARN study day/Pre Conference workshop organised by the Bath (UK) based Conversation Café in preparation for the 1st Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy, 2017, organised by ARNA. The second was organised to contribute to preparations for the ARNA 2019 conference. Both events included people physically in Bath and those living and working in countries around the world. They were brought into the gathering in Bath through SKYPE and/or their 'living-posters' (accessible from http://www.actionresearch.net/). The analysis is in terms of my relational values of an inclusive, emancipating, egalitarian society and the educational influence the knowledge generated has had in learning.

In the concluding section of this paper I return to the purpose of telling this story and ask, 'have I presented you with enough evidence to convince you that Living Theory research is a form of educational research and knowledge creation that offers mechanisms for social transformation, and motivates you to want to try it for yourself?'

Living Theory research and living-theory methodologies: educational research and knowledge creation

'Educational' has so many different meanings, some of which are a long way from the meaning I am giving to the word here, as Ginott illustrates:

> On the first day of the new school year, all the teachers in one private school received the following note from their principal:
>
> Dear Teacher,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:

- Gas chambers built by *learned* engineers.

- Children poisoned by *educated* physicians.

- Infants killed by *trained* nurses.

- Women and babies shot and burned by *high school* and *college* graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human. (Ginott, 1972, p.317)

I believe this should be the intention of all educational-practitioners, wherever their site of practice and irrespective of the age or stage of the learners they are working with, to enable us each to learn to become more human or, to borrow from Reiss and White (talking about the purpose of schools):

- to lead a life that is personally flourishing, and
- to help others to do so, too. (Reiss and White, 2003, p.1)

'Educational' learning is not a single path for all or for one person. It is, as Ginott and Reiss and White indicate, a complex, multidimensional relationally dynamic process some of which also gather from this representation of Ikigai (Figure 1)
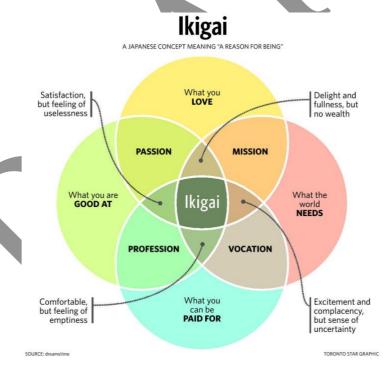

Figure 1 Ikigai

It is this rich meaning of 'educational' that I am using when I talk of educational research and knowledge; research and knowledge that is concerned with human beings learning to become more humane humans as they learn to lead a life that

is personally flourish and helping others do so too. This brings me to Living Theory research.

There are many forms of practitioner-research and research in education. Living Theory research is the only form I have found that is explicitly concerned with researching into educational practice to understand and improve it, and to generate valid explanations of educational influence in learning as contributions to a global educational knowledgebase. I have come to realise that engaging in the process of Living Theory research as an educational experience, as much as making public the educational knowledge generated, offers a mechanism for social transformation.

Whitehead (1989) first coined the term 'living-educational-theory' to mean, a researcher's valid values-based, explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations. The summary on the homepage of his website (http://www.actionresearch.net) will serve my purpose giving you a very brief introduction to what distinguishes Living Theory research and a living-theory:

> A Living Educational Theory (Living Theory) approach focuses attention on the experiences and implications of living values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. These values are the life-affirming and life-enhancing values that give meaning and purpose to the researcher's life. They are clarified as they emerge in the course of researching questions such as, 'How am I improving what I am doing?' They form the explanatory principles and standards by which improvements in both practice and knowledge-creation are judged.
>
> The approach stresses the importance of extending the influence of these ontological and relational values and understandings in explanations of educational influence. In a Living Educational Theory approach to research and a human existence, individuals hold their lives to account by producing accounts of their living-educational-theories; that is 'explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations, in enquiries of the kind, 'How am I improving what I am doing? (Whitehead, 1989).

A Living Theory researcher can use methods and draw insights from a range of other methodologies and theories, such as Action Research, Narrative Enquiry, Self-Study, Participatory Research, Autoethnography, Ethnography, Grounded Theory, Critical Theory and Case Study, as well as various quantitative methods.

Living Theory research begins with researching questions arising from researching practice in the here and now to understand and improve it, for instance, 'how do I improve what I am doing' or, 'am I living my values as fully as I can in my practice?' Living Theory research is a form of self-study, practitioner-research, which is not to be confused with a 'self' study, or a psychological study of self.

The researcher focussing on questions of the form, 'how do I improve what I am doing?' may draw on ideas from Living Theory research but may not necessarily go on to ask questions to which Living Theory offers a way of answering – that is to create a valid account of their living-theory – their values-based explanation of their educational influence in learning. For Living Theory to be an appropriate methodology the research always has to become focussed on exploring what has

been *learned* in the process of the researcher researching into their practice to understand and improve it. More specifically the researcher has to move on to answering their question, 'how do I *explain* my *educational influence* in my own *learning*, the learning of others and the learning of social formations within which I live and work?' The embodied life-enhancing values of the researcher, clarified as they emerge in the course of the research, form the explanatory principles and standards by which learning, practice and knowledge created is judged.

Living Theory research is not limited to those who work in schools, colleges or universities. Living Theory researchers work in diverse fields and cultures and draw insights from various practitioner-research and theoretical-research methodologies and methods, and knowledges as illustrated by these doctoral theses:

> Campbell, E. (2019). *Loved Into Learning: A Narrative Inquiry Exploring How Love Has Influenced Me As A Teacher.* Phd. Nipissing University, Canada.
>
>> Campbell, researches her practice as a Canadian schoolteacher. She used Narrative Enquiry in creating her living-theory methodology, and integrated insights from Collaborative Enquiry and Action Research. She shows her own social transformation through the process of creating her living-theory and extended her educational influence in the learning of others and social formations by working with others to start the Bluewater Action Research Network (BARN). Campbell has moved to another part of Canada but BARN is still going strong (Access from http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/barn/barn010217.pdf)
>
> Keizer-Remmers, A. (2017). *Underneath the Surface of Cosmopolitanism In Search of Cosmopolitanism in Higher Education*. PhD. University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, the Netherlands.
>
>> Kaiser-Remmers researched her practice working with students in a Netherlands' international professional university. She critically and creatively engages with the literature of Action Research, Anthropology, Auto-ethnography, Ethnography, History, Social Photo-Matrix , Sociology and more and describes her social transformation in the process of creating her living-theory.
>
> Qutoshi, S.B. (2016). *Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education In Pakistan*. Kathmandu University, Nepal.
>
>> Qutoshi, researching his practice leading transformative teacher education and research practices in Pakistan, drew on his autobiographical excavation of his socio-pedagogical context, employed Multiparadigmatic Design Space (MDS) and critically and creatively engaged with the work of Interpretivists, Criticalists, Postmodernists and Integralists. He created a great

deal in the course of his doctoral research, including his living-educational-theory of inclusive co-leadership with embodied values of intention of doing good for others, humility for humanity, care of self and others with ecological consciousness, love and peace, to bring emancipatory and transformative soul in the culturally embedded linear teacher education program.

These are just a few of the living-theories that have been awarded doctorates. You can get a further sense of the various contexts and fields within which Living Theory researchers have been creating educational knowledge and, in the process, bringing about a social transformation of themselves and others by looking at the titles of these three doctorates:

Elizabeth Wolvaardt's Doctoral Thesis, *Over the conceptual horizon of public health: A living theory of teaching undergraduate medical students*, 2013 University of Pretoria.

Phil Tattersall's Doctoral Thesis, *How am I generating a living theory of environmental activism with inclusionality?* Graduating April 2013 from the University of Western Sydney.

Bernie Sullivan's Doctoral Thesis, *A living theory of a practice of social justice: Realising the right of Traveller Children to educational equality*. Graduating 2006 from Limerick University. Ireland

Having given you a very brief view of the breadth and depth of Living Theory researchers' social transformations I want to illustrate the nature of the knowledge created and the data analysed by the Living Theory researcher and how Living Theory research offers a mechanism for social transformation. I will do this by showing and analysing a little of the data collected during and between two international events. The first event was a CARN study day/Pre Conference workshop organised by the Bath (UK) based 'Conversation Café' in preparation for the 1st Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy, 2017, organised by ARNA. The second was organised to contribute to preparations for the ARNA 2019 conference.

An explanation of educational influence in learning within and between two events

Rachel Burgess, a member of the Breakfast Conversation Café which meets weekly in Bath (UK), hosted both these events in her house. These were local events with international participation. Living Theory researchers in other localities were brought into the gathering through SKYPE and/or their living-posters.

For details of the 2017 event access the report from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwreportoncarnstudyday06021 6.pdf and for the 2019 event access the report from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwreport13april260419.pdf In these reports are explanations of educational influence in learning drawing on video recordings both in the room and of the SKYPEs as data.

I wish here to add to the analysis offered in those reports by drawing attention to the qualities of the setting. Rachel worked with others to prepare and create an inclusive, emancipating, egalitarian space for participants to engage in, and contribute to, a convivial and educational experience. Most of the people physically in the room knew one another; most being members of the weekly Breakfast Conversation Café. Some of those who were brought in through a multi-screen SKYPE and/or their living-posters were known to some, but not all, of those physically in the room or participating through SKYPE.

I said before that each story has many others within it so maybe here is the place to introduce the story of multi-screen SKYPEs, which Whitehead had been working on for years as a way of bringing people into educational connection, and the story of living-posters.

'Living-posters' had their genesis with the planning for a Town Hall event at ARNA 2015. The proposal shows where the stories of multi-screen SKYPEs and living-posters came together and later contributed to the creation of the events in Bath as educational experiences with a global perspective:

> There were two purposes for the session. One was the evolving one where individuals are encouraged to develop their own living-theories in cultures-of-inquiry as we have been learning with and from each other. Two was the introductory, transformational purpose of showing others entering into the dialogue with groups and individuals across the globe. These new voices in various parts of the world are extending the living-culture-of-inquiry and contributing their own living-educational-theories to this growing knowledge-base. (Delong, Whitehead, Huxtable, 2015)

We planned to bring as many as voices as possible into the Town Hall event from around the globe through multi-screen SKYPE. However, we were aware that there were many more who, for various reasons, could not be present even through SKYPE. How could we give all who were prepared to contribute to have an emancipatory, inclusive and egalitarian presence? A simple, low tech, solution was suggested which is described in the note sent round the various educational practitioner-research e-lists:

> Dear …
>
> The proposal for a Town Hall Meeting at the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) conference 7-8 May 2015 in Toronto has just been accepted. You can access the full proposal at http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arna/ARNA2015TownHallProposal090215.pdf . The conference has the theme of 'Joint Action - Learning with and from one another' and our Town Hall Meeting Title is: Come and join our live conversation with an international community of practitioner action researchers.
>
> The rationale for the session is:
>
> The efficacy of joint actions in learning with and from one another and how to enhance locally, regionally, nationally and globally the values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity, could be much improved given the recent increases in inequalities across the world. We are placing education at the heart of the processes of

enhancing this flow of values and understandings in creating living-cultures-of-inquiry for producing and sharing the living-theories of practitioner-researchers.

The Town Hall Meeting affords the opportunity for you to contribute to and benefit from "the globalising educational dialogues of individual practitioners who are exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in the generation and extension of living-cultures-of-inquiry." We would be delighted if you would join in and help develop educationally productive dialogue with groups and individuals across the globe who share a desire to give expression in their practice to values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity.

Although only a few people can take part in the event through SKYPE we can extend the possibilities of new connections being made by drawing attention to your work and making it available at and after the event if you:

> 1. create and upload an approximately 2 minute video-clip to YouTube of you and which communicates the essentials of your: context; interests; ontological and relational values that motivate you; research passions.
>
> 2. send us a pdf of an attractive A4 'flier' which includes brief details of your: context; interests; ontological and relational values that motivate you; research passions; details of a few of your key publications; the url to your website if you have one; your contact details and the url to your YouTube video. Do please circulate this note to other practitioner-researchers you know who might like to connect in the Town Hall Meeting of ARNA 2015 and we are sorry for any cross postings as you might be on other practitioner, action research, teacher research and Living Theory research lists.

 If you have problems, such as with videoing or uploading to YouTube, let us know and we will try to help.

Jack Whitehead - jack@actionresearch.net

Marie Huxtable - marie.huxtable@gmail.com

 Over 40 researchers offered their 'living-posters' in 2015, which were gathered into a 'homepage' for access in the session and to be available afterwards. Hyperlinks were included between individuals and the groups they were part of… I won't go into further detail as to why the layout was as it was, but suffice it to say I wanted people to be 'seen' and to 'see' themselves within, and by, a community of like-minded educational-practitioners.

Image 1. Living-posters, homepage 2015 access from
http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arna/arnaposters270415.pdf

The living-posters developed during the period between the two events in Bath. The number of educational-practitioners contributing their living-posters has more than doubled. The layout of the homepage has had to change to accommodate them all. You can find the latest by going to right hand menu on the homepage of https://www.actionresearch.net/

So, returning to the two events in Rachel's house remind us again. A good analysis of what occurred in the events is already well provided by the reports. I think you need to make a summary. What I would like to add here is an analysis of a small amount of the data provided by the living-posters of the learning that occurred between the events. I will draw on Swaroop Rawal living-posters to exemplify Living Theory research as a mechanism for social transformation.

Swaroop's first poster (2015) can be accessed from
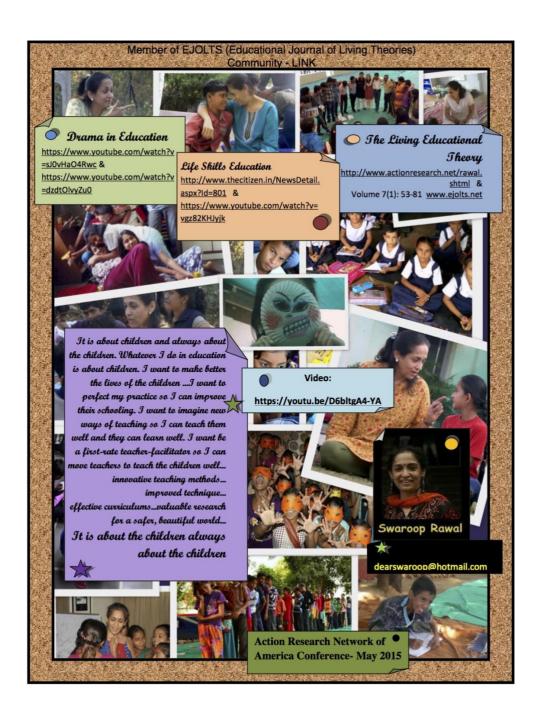https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aran/aranposters/SwaroopRawal2704.pdf

Image 2. Swaroop Rawal's first living-poster, 2015

Swaroop's 2018 living-poster can be accessed from
https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/swaroop250518.pdf

Image 3. Swaroop Rawal's 2018 living-poster

Her latest living-poster can be accessed from ……………

Image 4. Swaroop Rawal's 2019 living-poster

Swaroop also created a poster to communicate, "How Gandhiji's value of non-violence influenced the creation of my living educational theory", as an introduction to the June 2019 issue of EJOLTs communicates –

"We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations." (Gandhiji)

We recognize the enduring vision of Mahatma Gandhi's values as we research and locate our practice to create knowledge derived from the embodiment of our values and finding ways of living lives that are life-affirming for all. In June 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations responded to Mahatma Gandhi's call to action by establishing the International Day of Non-Violence. It is celebrated around the world on his birthday-2 October. To mark the 150th anniversary of Gandhiji's birth and in a gesture of solidarity we invite you to learn about the educational influence he has had in the learning, life and work of Swaroop, a Living Theory researcher, whose work is recognised as nationally and internationally influential. We hope Swaroop's poster will inspire you to respond to Gandhiji's call to action by creating and making public your explanations of your educational influence in your own learning, the learning of others and the learning of groups, communities and nations, and help others do the same.

"Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all - children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in ... equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts." Gandhiji.

The poster can be accessed from
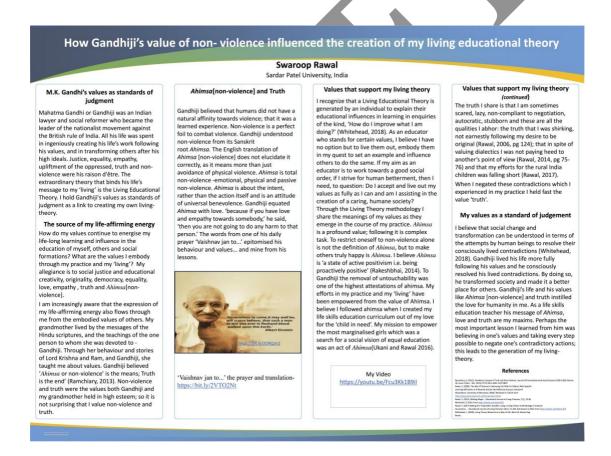https://ejolts.net/files/Gandhiandlivingeducationaltheory090619.pdf

Image 5. Swaroop Rawal's poster re Gandhi's influence

The moments captured in the posters and the movement between them illustrates how Swaroop, as a Living Theory researcher, brings the past into the present and forms the future that is transforming the lives of those she works with and for and the social formation she lives and works in.

Concluding thoughts

In the final section I will reflect on what I have learned in the process of creating and offering an account of my living-theory research and try to ascertain whether I have offered a persuasive argument that engaging in Living Theory research is a form of educational research that offers a mechanism (a process, technique, or system for achieving a result – Merriam Webster dictionary) for social transformation that carries hope for the future of humanity.

I will conclude the paper with a discussion of some of what I believe emerged that I hope might contribute to the learning of various social formations, such as ARNA. By making public this knowledge through a paper I also hope to provoke you, as you read, to reflect on what, if anything, you might do to enhance your contribution to the flourishing of a co-operative, humane society in a diverse, sustainable global ecology.

In the process of creating this paper to communicate some of the knowledge I have created through Living Theory research I have also come to understand more about an aspect of it as a mechanism for my own social transformation and as a mechanism for the social transformation of others.

The idea of 'living-posters' was brought into existence with the hope of enabling people and their work to have a presence in an event and a virtual space in an emancipating, egalitarian and inclusive manner. It has taken on a life of its own and has been used by various individuals as a research method and a way of recognising the evolution of their sites of practice.

I have learned to appreciate the importance of the oft-overlooked phase of Living Theory research when the researcher creates a 'writerly text' and then transforms it into a 'readerly' text. It is a mechanism by which the researcher turns first to focus on their own social transformation and then to focus on communicating what they have learned to contribute to an educational knowledgebase for others to draw on and which contributes to the social transformation of other individuals and the communities we live and work in to become more emancipatory, egalitarian and inclusive.

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