

Writings for presentation at the virtual 2020 CARN Conference on the 25th October 2020.

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A story for CARN following up the 1st International Living Educational Theory research Conference of the 27th June 2020

About five years ago I was looking to reboot my career in the direction of coaching and leadership training. I had been reflecting on the portfolio of paid and voluntary activities I had engaged in over the previous 15 or so years whilst parenting and caring for my parents when a careers adviser suggested I might like to participate in a Conversation Cafe run by Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable. I had no idea this was an educational research group but here began my introduction to Living Educational Theory research. After about a year of casually turning up most Friday mornings to what I considered to be stimulating engagement with enthusiastic minded community activists, my interest was piqued when reading Jacks review of de Sousa Santos's book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwreviewdesantos2016.pdf>). Slowly a penny started to drop. The notion of *Epistemicide* spoke to me as a military veteran. As a Commissioned Officer in the Royal Air Force, I'd served in the first Gulf War in 1991 and in the Balkans in 1992, before becoming aware that non-violent means were more effective in resolving conflict and therefore resigning from my Commission in 1999. Since then I'd come to accept that my military ways of doing things were not appropriate in the civilian world; after all, I had been trained to shoot people! Whilst it was always obvious that as a member of Her Majesty's armed forces I was required to subordinate my will to an external authority whilst in the RAF what was less obvious was how to regenerate and become aware of my own inner authority. With my curiosity ignited I began my inquiry.

First thing to engage with was to create a living poster (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/livingposterletterA.pdf>) and include a 3 min video of my research interest. I wanted to find out how I could contribute to society in a way that was significant for me. Many avenues I'd explored previously had proved fruitless or perhaps more frankly, boring. In 2017, under the auspices of CARN, Jack had come up with an idea of a preconference workshop in preparation for the first Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy where de Santos, the inventor of epistemicide, was due to deliver the keynote. At the time the building where the Friday morning conversation café was held was due to undergo refurbishment and it was then I took the opportunity to offer to host the event in my home. The next thing I knew was Jack and Marie breezing into my home and transforming my sitting room into a classroom. 10 people gathered in person and 5 on Skype. (<https://knowledgedemocracy.org/2017/02/15/report-on-the-carn-study-daypre-conference-workshop/>).

The next event was in June when again from the comfort of my own sofa I found myself watching Santos keynote live-streamed from Cartagena. There was a sort of workshop afterwards but it was difficult to participate only by writing in the chat box although one of our Friday morning café members managed to ask a question to which Santos responded at some length.

Fast forward another couple of years to 2019 by which time I'd become interested in global citizenship and specifically the work of Mark Potts whose doctorate (<https://www.actionresearch.net/living/markpotts.shtml>) focused on the value of living global citizenship. Again my interest was motivated by a comparison between taking responsibility for my actions as a former member of our armed

forces, in comparison with my actions as civilian and military veteran. This is where the requirement in living educational theory to use values as explanatory principles and standards of judgement proved to be the difference that made the difference. Standards of judgement in the military are clearly defined, predetermined and are definitely not self-generated.

Aware that in 2019 the Educational Journal of Living Theory was about to celebrate its 10th anniversary (<https://ejolts.net/node/344>) it seemed appropriate to create another opportunity to host a gathering in my home. This time there were seven people present in person and over the course of the day we included another 37 people on Skype participating in 4 sessions over 6 hours. For both gatherings it somehow seemed important to print and display the living posters of those who would be participating via Skype – a kind of recognition and representation of those who were not physically present.

Mark Potts had agreed to join us via Skype from his home in Salisbury, and during his presentation of his post graduate research into living global citizenship he mentioned that the current political situation (Brexit and the election of Trump) had been a motivating influence for him to organise democracy cafes once a month in his home town of Salisbury. Another opportunity had opened up. Living only 40 miles from Salisbury it seemed viable to ‘give it a go’ and a couple of weeks later, willingly accompanied by my husband, I was experiencing Living Educational Theory research making a difference in a community (my reflections on spanglefish already – some of which is quoted by Mark in his last paper <https://ejolts.net/node/347>). My contribution was also acknowledged in the report that followed.

What is significant in me telling you this is that to illustrate that by participating in the educational activities in the form of conversations underpinned by Living Educational Theory research I was becoming aware of a transformation of my former professional identity as a commissioned officer as I became more involved in an educational research community. I found myself speaking less about how UK veterans were less valued in comparison with the US veterans and more considering exactly what my voice was contributing to. A period of uneasy silence ensued, and I began to realise that remaining silent was contributing towards an inability to create my own future possibilities without repeating patterns congruent with my training from the military. This state of affairs I found myself in, not only rendered me powerless to participate effectively in a democratic society but perhaps more importantly that any contribution I might have offered would have been from unexamined and biased perception.

This realisation increased my motivation to continue on my research journey and this year actively participate in educational research by working together with Jack and Marie to create, produce and run the first Living Educational Theory research conference (<http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering/index.asp>).

Finding my own voice whilst working co-operatively with Jack and Marie, as opposed to playing a supporting role, was the first challenge I faced. Working alongside two established academics, one the founder of Living Educational Theory research and the other, the editor of the Educational Journal of living Theories, I was able to include and transcend my military leadership style by learning (sometimes uncomfortably and often with humour) to co-create, plan and run an online conference during the COVID lockdown. In abandoning my previous notions of hierarchy moments of great joy and fulfilment began to emerge over a period of time where the intensity of our relationship increased through conversations via skype. Our collective intent to work together with democratic resolve transformed any tensions in our conversations. On occasions the release of tension created the impetus for our actions. Our desire to create an international event, in which participants would converse with one another with intent to contribute towards their own and others research, supported us as we created a question for participants to focus on as the theme for the event. Each participant was asked to

prepare a 3 minute presentation based on the conference question as a contribution to a facilitated research conversation.

In order to achieve our aim Living Posters were submitted (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/participants2020conference.pdf>) as part of the registration process Reading the posters offered insights into the worlds of individuals striving for a better world, people who cared. By getting to know them this way, I began to feel that I was creating a social event where guests would arrive and it was my duty to introduce and welcome them into our research community. For me personally, the beauty of a living poster has been to hold thoughts and embryonic ideas. In playing with various iterations of my own living poster a sense of freedom has emerged. As I use my imagination, unfettered by pressure or demand to be comprehensible in the first instance, and include acts of artistic expression in a quest to embrace both the art and science of effective communication.

The living posters that participants submitted were used in the process of grouping participants with a facilitator. In doing so i/we learnt a little about what was igniting our 'guests' interest so that we could bring them together to experience a relaxed and enjoyable conviviality in one another's company, despite the geographical distance that separated them.

On the day, 50 participants from 14 different countries joined us via Zoom (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/participants2020conference.pdf>) and with them, a growing sense of community at the heart of which was the development of new educational relationships and innovative programmes from around the world; all with the intent for human flourishing. Such programmes included Democracy Cafés, a Life Skills Education Programme in India and Values Led Leadership programme respectively pioneered by Mark Potts, Swaroop Rawal and Joy Mounter, giving evidence that Living Educational Theory research makes a difference in organisations and communities. But most significantly of all for me personally has been the transformational effect of an educational methodology that has enabled me to change my perception of myself, leaving behind a military mindset as my primary mode of operating and embrace a way of being that has potential to create for myself a new way forward as a global citizen.

As I sign off at the end of this 10 minutes I hope I've managed to chart my progress from casual observer to active participant in both scholarly and community activities over 5 years engagement in a Living Educational Theory research community which I experience gathering momentum as a social movement. And by highlighting Living Educational Theory research as a methodology I hope to move from being voiceless to being heard in writing thus moving from someone else's notion of epistemicide to my theory of knowledge creation. After all isn't the capacity to create ones knowledge what education is all about?