

## Changing Lives through Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry

In this symposium, five international practitioner-researchers share their research: Jacqueline Delong, Canada; Tara Ratnam, India; Parbati Dhungana, Nepal; Michelle Vaughan, USA; Jack Whitehead, UK. We share our learning as a culture of inquiry where we co-create knowledge and as individuals in our contexts. The following conference sub-themes will be addressed: Community action and activism; Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; Improving practice in the face of adversity & pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; Social Justice and equity; Educational and educative change; Methodological rigour and innovation. Evidence will be shared to justify the claim that Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research are changing lives with values of human flourishing within living cultures of inquiry. “What is the more general value of this initiative? Our work gets its validity from how the meaning we produce resonates with others working in other contexts with similar concerns-- contributing to the larger dialogue on educational issues of equity, change, knowledge co-construction and conducting research”

You can access the 86 minutes of the symposium by clicking on the youtube url below:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atgl0KI5wjA>

**1) Changing Lives through Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research in Culture of Inquiry**

Jacqueline Delong, International Mentor, Canada.

Paper retrieved from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/jddindiviCARNsymp031022.pdf>

Slides retrieved from

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/jddCARNpptindivsessionslides.pdf>

My contribution is two-fold: One is my action research on my improving my practice and living my values more fully as a mentor to practitioner-researchers who are creating their own living-educational-theories. In the past few years (DeLong et al, 2021, 2022), I have become more aware of the inequities in educational research and my research is a Living Educational Theory research process to increase my understanding of Eastern Wisdom Traditions, its languages, concepts and images and be more vigilant about the impositional, colonizing nature of the Western Critical Traditions and the English language as I mentor practitioner-researchers to create their living-educational-theories in Cultures of inquiry. I work to find ways to mitigate “epistemicide” (Santos, 2014) in other ways of knowing and continue to research my practice for its improvement and mentor others to do the same.

Two is to research the processes of our culture of inquiry as I work to improve the ways in which it supports and encourages the members of our community as we co-create and co-learn.

**2) Improving practice while exploring new ways to connect to students during the pandemic crisis**

Tara Ratnam, India.

Slides retrieved from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/TARACARNsymp.pdf>

9:31 minute video of Tara Ranam’s practice presentation for this symposium.

Retrieved from

<https://youtu.be/n9t2WzZfxZA>

This study traces the emergent dynamics of an informal initiative during the COVID-19 school closure in the Indian context to explore its implications for promoting equitable and inclusive educational systems. The initiative took shape in the course of supporting a small group of school teachers in their efforts to engage their rural based students remotely within constraints of poor access to digital resources. The teachers were finding it a challenge to ‘connect’ to students online and felt that the control they exerted over students in their traditional face-to-face class eluded them online: *How can we motivate students to listen to our teaching and answer?* (a

teacher). The teachers' felt need was the stimulus to explore with them how students' voice and their creative works could play a role in engaging them by making learning personally meaningful to them. These teachers participated in biweekly online classes that a professional colleague and I conducted for their students. This qualitative study examines the development of our "living educational theory" of practice (Whitehead, 1989) as we each (individually and collectively) negotiated the dilemmatic spaces (the "living contradictions" experienced) encountered in the alternative cultural environment that the initiative provided us. The pedagogy we modelled was informed by the tenets of Bakhtinian dialogic pedagogy. The notion of dialogism helps bring students' voice, their experience and knowledge center stage in relating to them.

Connects to: Changing lives through AR- through changing response to new circumstances-

**Concern:** issues of equity, of providing experience of educational continuity to resource poor students

**Action:** Online explorations in a collective of students (family); teachers and educators in the role of more experienced peers

**Reflection on the consequence of our action:** What new meaning/understanding/knowledge has emerged from this joint exploration (about ourselves, our students, our role relationships, knowledge, teaching and learning?) (involves questioning assumptions and realize/reveal new understanding and possibilities for change in times of crisis)

**Significance:** What is the more general value of this initiative? Our work gets its validity from how the meaning we produce resonates with others working in other contexts with similar concerns-- contributing to the larger dialogue on educational issues of equity, change, knowledge co-construction and conducting research

### 3) How did the culture of inquiry influence myself and others?

Parbati Dhungana, Katmandu University, Nepal.

Slides retrieved from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/parbati.pdf>

Nepal also has a similar context to Tara's where the digital divide has extended the gap between haves (technology) and have-nots. Like Tara and Michelle, I value connection with my students in my professional context (teacher educator). I think the connection with students influences my students and my learning. The COVID-19 context opened up many possibilities for critical self-reflective school teachers to re/connect with students using technology (Dhungana, 2022). However, using technology was not enough in the higher education context.

I think, seeing from a Yogic perspective, connection to the students is connected to the life energy that is located in the heart chakra. Chakras are life energy centers or life-affirming energies all humans have (Pond, 2000). Living values are life-affirming energies (Whitehead, 19..). My living value, 'living love' is my life-affirming value which is connected to the Heart Chakra (Dhungana, 2020). According to Pond

(2000) joy and kindness are evidence of living heart chakra, and fear of losing that or those you love is imbalanced compassionate love or heart chakra. When the “fear of losing those you love diminishes, finally to be dissolved with the awakening to Universal love”, the experience of heaven on earth (Pond, 2000, p. 66.)

And yes that is exactly what is happening to me. I feel universal energy flowing when I participate in dialectical discourses [e.g., Eastern Wisdom Traditional (EWT)] within “a culture of inquiry” (DeLong, 2022). Perhaps, EWT dialectical discourse within our dialogues enables me to connect and sustain heart chakra consciousness (e.g., lived and balanced my heart chakra). Here arises a research-like question, how can I improve what I have been doing?

I can enhance connection with students by engaging them in class discussions or dialogues that include dialectical discourses. Generally, classroom dialogues lack dialectical discourses. I believe that dialectical discourse is a way of co-construction knowledge in which teachers and students participate in the discussion or dialogue actively, equally, and meaningfully. Vedas and Upanishads are some evidence of it. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, dialectical discourse enhances students’ 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (e.g., critical and creative skills). Besides, dialectical discourse enhances and balances my heart chakra. Therefore, my possible research question is—*how can I improve my interaction (discussion or dialogue) with my students?*

#### **4) Changing lives through values-embedded action research.**

Michelle Vaughan, Florida Atlantic University, USA.

Slides retrieved from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/michelle.pdf>

Within my context of online learning, I see the challenges presented by the virtual medium leading to inequity in learning. Without a physical connection or the ability to feel the exchange of loving energy from your teacher, online students can be left isolated, and the pedagogy can easily slip into an execution of tasks as opposed to a pedagogy of care.

Self-determination theory explains that “people tend to internalize and accept as their own the values and practices of those to whom they feel, or want to feel, connected, and from contexts in which they experience a sense of belonging. In the classroom, relatedness is deeply associated with a student feeling that the teacher genuinely likes, respects, and values him or her.” In my own journey to address the question, “How do I improve my practice?” I believe that the genuine caring and love we show our students has a greater impact on their educational experience than the content we deliver. In fact, I argue that connection within any learning context must precede content. As the shift to online learning accelerated across the globe, it becomes necessary to examine how we connect to students in a virtual setting. How do feelings of genuine caring and love travel virtually and what must we, as educators, do to ensure our students are receiving the loving energy we are sending?

The ideas I would contribute to the symposium are focused on creating equity in online learning, however, I would argue that the significance in these ideas and the true goal is to create equity-minded humans through modeling what authentic caring and love can look and feel like. A classroom is an opportunity to teach and learn, but it is not limited to academic content. Online students in my graduate program have shared that they want to see evidence of investment, opportunities to connect, and loving communication from their instructors. And, yes, this will lead to a better educational experience, but I believe that this is also a roadmap to model a better human experience of connection. I would also like to continue to learn more about the definition of harmony through the lens of EWT and evolve my own language and understanding to integrate harmony as a goal of my practice.

### **5) Contributing to Changing Lives through Action and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry**

Jack Whitehead, University of Cumbria, UK.

Paper retrieved from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/jwCARN2022symposium151022.pdf>

My contribution to the symposium will focus on sharing insights from a broad range of researchers and practitioners into how action research and Living Educational Theory Research can contribute to the greater good through asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice in higher education with values of human flourishing?' (see- <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>). Building on the contributions to the symposium I will develop Ratnam's idea that the meanings we produce resonate with others, working in other contexts with similar concerns, to contribute to the larger dialogue on educational issues of equity, change, knowledge co-construction and conducting research. (see AERA 2021 and 2022 Symposia at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf> and <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/AERA2022sessionprop.pdf> ).

You can also access Jack Whitehead's individual presentation on '**Changing Lives and Transforming Cultures Using Living Educational Theory and Action Research,**' to the CARN 2022 Conference from:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/carn2022/jwindividualcarn2022paper071022.pdf>