Changing Lives and Transforming Cultures Using Living Educational Theory and Action Research

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Abstract

This research is focused on the evidence that shows individual practitioner-researchers are changing their own lives as they seek to improve their professional practice by living their own unique constellations of values of human flourishing as fully as possible. It includes the evidence of contributions to academic cultural transformations in bringing evidence and values-based explanatory principles and standards of judgement into Universities around the world through the legitimation of the living-educational-theories of individual practitioner-researchers. These are the explanations of educational influences in the learning of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. The research includes an analysis of the transformations in the lives of individuals and their social contexts as living-educational-theories are shared in the Educational Journal of Living Theories from a broad range of practitioner researchers working in diverse contexts such as South Africa, the UK, Republic of Ireland, Nepal, India, Pakistan, the USA, Australia, China, the Philippines, Hawaii and South America. The research will be analysed in terms of its contribution to the conference sub-themes of: Community action and activism; Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; Improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; Social Justice and equity; Educational and educative change; Critical pedagogies; Social cohesion; Methodological rigour and innovation. Particular attention will be paid to issues of colonisation and decolonisation in changing lives and transforming cultures with relationally dynamic values of human flourishing including, freedom, justice, care, love, respect and democracy.

Introduction

This research is focused on the evidence that shows individual practitioner-researchers are changing their own lives as they seek to improve their professional practice by living their own unique constellations of values of human flourishing as fully as possible. It includes an evidence and values-laden explanation of an individual practitioner-researcher changing his life and contributing to transforming cultures of inquiry using living educational theory and action research.

It extends this evidence in contributions to academic cultural transformations, in bringing evidence and values-based explanatory principles and standards of judgement into Universities around the world, through the legitimation of the living-educational-theories of individual practitioner-researchers. Living-educational-theories are the explanations of educational influences in the learning of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located.

The research includes an analysis of the communications of transformations in the lives of individuals in their contributions to cultures of inquiry as they share their living-educational-theories in their doctorates, in their Educational Journal of Living Theories and their living-posters from a broad range of practitioner researchers working in diverse contexts such as South Africa, the UK, Republic of Ireland, Nepal, India, Pakistan, the USA, Australia, China, the Philippines, Hawaii and South America.

The research has also been analysed in another presentation to the conference in terms of its contribution to the conference sub-themes of: Community action and activism; Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; Improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; Social Justice and equity; Educational and educative change; Critical pedagogies; Social cohesion; Methodological rigour and innovation (Whitehead, 2022)

Particular attention will be paid to issues of colonisation and decolonisation in changing lives and transforming cultures with relationally dynamic values of human flourishing including, freedom, justice, care, love, respect and democracy.

Evidence from an individual practitioner-researcher of changing his life and contributing to cultural transformation

In 1976, the year of CARN's beginning I produced two reports on a project on Improving Learning for 11-14 year olds in Mixed Ability Science Groups.

Whitehead, J. (1976) An 11-14 Mixed Ability Project in Science: The Report on a local curriculum Development. DRAFT March 1976. Retrieved from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmaemarch1976all.pdf

This draft report explained the teachers' practices in terms of models of innovation, change in the teaching learning process and a model of evaluation. The teachers understood my use of academic models to explain their practices but asking me to reconstruct the report as they

could not see themselves in the report. Together with one of the teachers I reconstructed the report from the data I had collected and explicated my first use of action-reflection cycles for inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in:

Whitehead, J. (1976) Improving Learning for 11-14 Year Olds in Mixed Ability Science Groups. Final Report August 1976. Retrieved from
https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ilmagall.pdf

This was accepted by the teachers as a valid explanation of their teaching practices.

The transformation between the reports provides evidence, from myself as an individual practitioner-researcher, of changing my life in exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

My contribution to cultural transformation can be understood as I fulfil one of the requirements of research is that it makes available for public criticism the knowledge being generated through research. Following Said, I understand culture as a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought ((Said, 1993, pp. xii-xiv). I understand education and educational research to involve learning with values of human flourishing. It is the focus on making public the learning that focuses on living values of human flourishing as fully as possible, that is contributing to cultural transformation.

Said, E. (1993) Culture and Imperialism, London; Vintage

Between 1967-2022, I have documented by professional learning in my inquiries, 'How do I improve my practice?', as a professional educator and educational researcher (See https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml). This is the data archive I draw on to extend the above evidence from an individual practitioner-researcher of changing his life and contributing to cultural transformation.

My present research activities that are changing my life and contributing to cultural transformation are focused on my contributions to community based educational research as I engage with supporting the activities of staff at Nelson Mandela University, North West University, Durban University of Technology, the University of the Free State, Limerick University and Cumbria University, who are developing their Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development. You can access some of their living-posters from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf

Here are the details of the areas of focus of a Memorandum of University that is currently being signed by Nelson Mandela University, Limerick University, North West University and the University of the Free State. I shall be documenting my learning that is changing my life and contributing to cultural transformation from my position as Extraordinary Professor of Community-Based Educational Research at North West University, as I contribute to and research the following areas of focus:

Extending the evidence in contributions to academic cultural transformations

I am also extending the evidence of individual's changing their lives and contributing to cultural transformations in the collection of Living Educational Theory Research doctorates at https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml . Each doctorate has been legitimated by a University has having made an original contribution to knowledge. Each living-educational-theory has used values of human flourishing as explanatory principles in an explanation of educational influences in learning. Each individual documents the changes in their life as they seek to live their values of human flourishing as fully as possible. They are contributing to cultural transformations as they make public their original contributions to knowledge with values of human flourishing.

Communicating individual and cultural transformations

As well as making public their contributions to knowledge and cultural transformations through their doctorates, Living Educational Theory Researchers also communicate their individual and cultural transformations, through their living-posters and contributions to the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS).

The homepage of living-posters can be accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf together with the guidance on how to create and share their living-poster:

> Creating a living-poster is easy! Create your poster as a single slide using a common programme such as PowerPoint. (You can create a page in a document using a programme like WORD if you prefer). A living-poster is intended as an opportunity to bring attention to your sites of practice and your research passions and interests and help you connect with people with similar research passions and interests.
>
> Use images and minimal text to quickly communicate the essence of your sites of

practice; interests; the values that motivate you and give your life meaning and purpose; research passions. Please use 'insert' (not copy and paste) and use low resolution images otherwise your file becomes huge!

Helps if you add:

• A photo of you, a few details of your context (e.g. where you are based) and your email address,
• A couple of your key publications,
• The url to your website if you have one (see below) and the url to your 2-3 minute video clip on YouTube of you communicating the essentials of: your context, interests, research passions, practice and values as the explanatory principles and living standards of judgment to which you hold yourself accountable in your practice

Send to jack@actionresearch.net:

• Two files of your living-poster
i. as a PDF and
ii. in whatever programme you have used to create it e.g. PowerPoint, WORD
• 1-4 keywords that summarise the essence of what you are about.

The current issue and archive of issues of EJOLTS between 2008-2022 can be accessed from https://ejolts.net/current , with a focus on:

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. Researchers new to Living Theory research might visit an introduction and read the Advanced Bluffer's Guide.

Contributing to the conference sub-themes

In another presentation to the CARN 2022 Conference (Whitehead, 2022) I have explained how my research is contributing to the conference sub-themes of: community action and activism; knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; including diverse voices and perspectives; social justice and equity; educational and educative change; methodological rigour and innovation.

Issues of Colonisation and Decolonisation.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) Decolonizing Methodologies focused my attention on critiquing Western paradigms of research and knowledge. Smith challenges traditional Western ways of knowing and researching. She calls for the "decolonization" of methodologies, and, in particular, for a new agenda of indigenous research. Smith, defines "decolonization" as being concerned with having "a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices".

My first experience of colonisation was in the part-time Academic Diploma course at the London Institute of Education between 1968-70 as I was working as a full-time science teacher in a London Comprehensive School. The dominant view of educational theory was that it was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. The practical principles I used to explain my educational influences in learning were seen as pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental, theoretical justification (Hirst, 1983, p. 18). I experienced colonisation in the imposition of the view that my practical principles should be replaced by principles from the disciplines of education. By 1972, when I was a Head of Science at Erkenwald Comprehensive School in London, I rejected this colonisation by the disciplines approach and moved to the University of Bath to see if I could contribute to decolonising educational theory by including within the theory the practical principles that teachers and educators used to explain their educational influences in learning. I coined the idea of a living-educational-theory as an individual's explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located.

In developing a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices, I advocate the use of the following questions asked to a validation group, to strengthen the decolonising influence of validation in explanations of educational influences in learning. A validation group is usually constituted by 3-8 peers. The questions are related to the four criteria of validity that Habermas (1976, pp. 1-2) claims are necessary to communication and the evolution of society.

  i)   How can I enhance the comprehensibility of my explanation?
  ii)   How can I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my explanation?
  iii)   How can I deepen and extend my understanding of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in my explanation?
  iv)   How can I enhance the authenticity of my explanation to show that I am living my values as fully as possible?

Validation groups are grounded in Popper's (1975, p. 44) idea of intersubjective testing to strengthen the objectivity of an explanation through the mutual rational controls of critical discussion.

The third question is focused on developing a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices. Reducing colonising bias in an explanation includes extending and deepening sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings in an explanation of educational influences in learning. For example, following my recent appointment as Extraordinary Professor in Community Based Educational Research at North-West University in South Africa, I am paying particular attention to the cultural influences of Ubuntu ways of being (Whitehead, 2003) in explanations of educational influences in learning.

Working with Tara Ratnum from India and Parbati Dhungana from Nepal (Delong, et al, 2022) has introduced me to cultural values that influence their research, such as Ardhanarishvaro:

In a symposium at this CARN 2022 five international practitioner-researchers share their research. Clockwise from bottom right they are Tara Ratnam, India, Parbati Dhungana, Nepal, Michelle Vaughan, USA, Jack Whitehead, UK, Jacqueline Delong, Canada.

As my research focuses on changing lives and transforming cultures using living educational theory and action research, I am stressing the importance of digital visual data in explanations of educational influences in learning. This is because of limitations in purely text-based representations for communicating the meanings of the embodied values that are used as explanatory principles in learning, (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006 a & b).

Here is an extract from my contribution to the above CARN 2022 Symposium that emphasises the importance of collaboration and of using digital visual data in explanations of educational influence with an Ubuntu way of being as a value that support the flourishing of humanity:

> I am also collaborating with the following staff at Nelson Mandela University in developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to our continuing professional development. These include clockwise from the top left, Marie Huxtable, Linda Ntombovuyo, Jack Whitehead, Muano Nethengwe, Jessica Jacobs, Awongiwe Magutywa and Liyema Mpompi.

I am also working and researching in a similar way, with Ubuntu as a valued way of being in human flourishing with staff at North-West University and Durban University of Technology. You can see the beginnings of these collaborations in the living-posters from the above three South African Universities at https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf

In the centre of this homepage of living-posters are guidelines on how to develop and share your own living-posters. I do hope that you will help to extend and deepen the above collaborations, on changing lives through action research and living educational theory research in cultures of inquiry.

In this contribution to CARN 2022 I want to focus on the importance of visual digital data in communicating the meanings of embodied values and their integration into evidence and values-based explanations of educational influences in learning. I am thinking particularly of the embodied expressions of Ubuntu ways of being in values of human flourishing. The following extracts from a conversation in 2003 focuses on the values of an Ubuntu way of being. The images above communicate to me the flow of energy-flowing values within communities of practitioner-researchers, which I identify as being at the heart of Ubuntu ways of being:

Whitehead, J. (2003) The Growth of My Educational Knowledge in Responding to the Originalities of Mind and Critical Judgements of Others. Retrieved from http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jw10nov03.htm

> I'm sometimes startled and fascinated by the originality of other people as I experience them expressing their meanings in ways I haven't thought of. After some confusion, as I seek to understand these unfamiliar meanings, I begin to understand myself and the world in which I live, in new ways. As the originality of mind of others influences my own, I integrate new insights into

my understandings. The public sharing of these new insights, in Monday evening conversations in the Department of Education of the University of Bath, helps me to clarify my insights, test their validity through the public exercise of critical judgement and hence include them in the growth of my educational knowledge.

Here are some of the ideas and experiences that have recently surprised, fascinated and disturbed me:

1) **Eden Charles' description of his visit to Africa (including Sierra Leone) and Ubuntu way of being.**

> · *"When I got to Sierra Leone they took me (to work with the victims of the war). I did some of the work with the team of people who worked with the victims, particularly women who had been raped and who had had babies by the armies who were fighting against them . So, I did some work with those teams and I met some of those people. It was very, very difficult. For me, one of the things that did is that despite the fact that I call myself African in a lot of ways, despite the fact that I have African friends there was something about being there and seeing the pain that people had been through and just seeing the complete humanity of those people in that pain and seeing the fact that it hurt them just as much as hurt anyone else. It wasn't another country somewhere else. It wasn't , 'Well they've always got wars in Africa so that they are used to it'. No, they aren't used to it. It's awesome. It's devastating . And for me reaching somebody where she's raising a child whose father raped her and killed her husband and this woman has got to deal with all those kinds of issues, it did something to me Jack that was deeper than all the political theory . It brought home to me at another level, the humanity thing. In a sense the unity of humanity in the way we hurt, in the aspirations for our children and dealing with the terrible contradiction of 'I love my husband, he's dead and I'm raising a child by the man that killed him.'"*   (Eden Charles, video-taped conversation, 31 Oct. 2003)

I've a 12.6 Megabyte Mpeg 4 video clip of 1min 4.3 seconds of this conversation that I can send people who have broadband. Eden has said that it is OK to share this and I'm going to do this on Monday 10ᵗʰ Nov. As Eden describes his experience, I felt the communication of a loving warmth of humanity. As Eden speaks I feel that this is intimately connected to the humanity of the women who have experienced such pain. In my understanding I connect this communication with Eden's way of being in Ubuntu and his African Cosmology. I hope to express myself on Monday in a way that shows the influence of my understanding of Ubuntu that is recognisable by others. I take such recognition to be a necessary step in the social validation of my own living educational theory. I'll distinguish my personal validation from this social validation and relate one to the other. I will draw on Tim Murithi's ideas on Practical Peacemaking Wisdom from Africa: Reflections on *Ubuntu* . Tim says that the cultural world-view known as *ubuntu* highlights the essential unity of humanity and emphasizes the importance of constantly referring to

the principles of empathy, sharing and cooperation in our efforts to resolve our common problems. You can access Tim's paper at http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/monday/Ubuntu.htm

As we work and research to change our lives with values of human flourishing and transforming cultures using living educational theory and action research, I am suggesting that we acknowledge the values of human flourishing from other cultures. I am not suggesting that we simply appropriate these values in a process of colonisation. I am suggesting that we acknowledge the cultural values of Ubuntu and Ardhanarishvaro. In drawing insights from Ubuntu I am suggesting that our relationships are distinguished by the recognition that 'I am because we are' and that 'We are because I am'. I am also suggesting that we draw insights from Ardhanarishvaro in seeking to generate a harmonious and equitable space for all. In drawing insights from such different cultural traditions I am suggesting that we get closer to living as global citizens who are living the values of human flourishing as fully as possible within our global communities. I do hope that this presentation has served to encourage you to join and contribute to this global social movement.

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