# Educational responses to reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory Research.

Symposium CARN 2023, October 26-28, 2023
Friends Meeting House 6 Mount Street Manchester, UK,
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with
Mairin Glenn, Republic of Ireland; Michelle Vaughan, USA;
Tara Ratnam, India; and Jack Whitehead, UK.

Abstract

The argument in this paper is that by reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory research, in concert with the other members of our group, Tara Ratnam, Michelle Vaughan, Mairin Glenn and Jack Whitehead, I can contribute:

a. to encouraging and supporting practitioners to create their own living-educational-theories,
b. to improving my practice as a mentor
c. to raising teacher-researchers' voices,
d. clarifying for myself and others the process of values as explanatory principles and
e. to enhancing our Culture of Inquiry and to inviting others to engage as global citizens for human flourishing.

Within these contributions, I extend my understandings of the nature of my influence, how I use my values to explain my influence as I create my own living-educational-theory and encourage others to do the same. My values include safe, democratic cultures of inquiry, loving educational relationships, and loved into learning. Evidence is provided of contributing to transforming lives using Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry as a 'way of life/living' (Griffin & Delong, 2021).

The framework for the paper includes the following headings:
1. Introduction
2. Socio-historical-culture context
3. Purpose
4. Perspectives
5. Modes of Inquiry
6. Data Sources
7. Results
8. Significance
9. Conclusion

1. **Introduction**

In my quest to improve myself and the world around me, I freely give my time and experience to mentor graduate and post-graduate researchers around the world wanting to create their own living-educational-theories. Currently, I am working with individuals in Nepal, China, Netherlands, Kenya, Canada, and Ireland. In addition, I learn, research, write and present (Delong et al, 2021, 2022, 2023) with our Cross-cultural Culture of Inquiry members from UK, Ireland, USA, and India. Recently, I was inspired by Timothy Snyder's (2017) book, "On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century". Among the lessons he proposes is: "Learn from peers in other countries. Keep up friendships abroad. The present difficulties in the United States are an element of a larger trend. And no country is going to find a solution by itself." (Chap 16, p.1).  His premise is that democracies are at risk because the citizens are manipulated by leaders like Hitler and a recent past president (whom he does not name) through the media, fear-mongering, fake news and inciteful language. And our job as citizens is to read and think deeply, stand up to wrong behaviours, encourage and support good organizations and learn from history.

In this paper, I want to be more proactive in contributing as a global citizen and scholar and learning from friendships abroad in our Cross-cultural Culture of Inquiry and from the participants in our session, 'Educational responses to reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory Research'.

**2. Socio-historical-culture context**

Our context can be seen in sharing the contributions that our Cross-cultural Culture of Inquiry have made at the American Educational Research Association on educational responsibility (Delong et al. 2021), equity (Delong et al. 2022) and consequential educational research (Delong et al. 2023). They include the educational responses from the 2022 CARN Symposium on 'Changing Lives through Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry' and the 2023 CARN (spring) Symposium on 'Talking locally connecting globally across the living boundaries of cultures of inquiry.' The educational responses are focused on the epistemological contributions of generated individual and community-based explanations of educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing.

The explanations are influenced by cultural influences from Canada, Republic of Ireland, USA, India and UK. The relationally dynamic values that form explanatory principles in the explanations of educational influences in learning include my research on international mentoring and Cultures of Inquiry, Glenn's research on sharing school-based research, Vaughan's research on giving voice to teacher researchers, Ratnam's research on excessive entitlement and best-loved self and Whitehead's research on the generation of living-educational-theories with values of human flourishing. Through our collaborative research we also share our community generated explanations of educational influences with values of human flourishing as we explore researching and answering the real-world questions, 'How do I/We improve my/our professional practices?'

### 3. Purpose

My purposes include:

- Explaining the nature of my influence as an international mentor on myself, others and social formations using my values as explanatory principles. By analyzing the results of reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory Research in my international mentoring, I look for evidence of helping others transform their lives.
- Making improvements in creating Cultures of Inquiry and inviting others in
- Contributing to increasing publication, use and referencing of classroom teachers' practitioner research.

### 4. Perspectives

My contribution to "Research in the Real World: Reaching out to people and communities" is to share my research as I ask the question, 'How can I improve my mentoring practice and build Cross-Cultural Cultures of Inquiry?' My perspective includes the learning I experience within our culture of inquiry where the insights of my colleagues in this community deepen my understandings. One of these understandings has been in the nature of the Eastern Wisdom Tradition. In the following clip from her article (Dhungana, 2023), you see Jack Whitehead and I learning about Eastern Wisdom traditions from Parbati Dhungana:



**Video 1:** Influencing self and others with Nepali culture of values

https://youtu.be/zPoNpawl-Wk
(Dhungana, 2023a)

She writes: Although I inherited a questioning culture from my ancestors, who questioned their gurus to influence themselves and their social formations (see the Bhagavat Gita), I could not understand it until I experienced being "loved into learning" the Culture of Inquiry. (Dhungana, 2023).

You see my value of 'loved into learning' in her writing above. I hope that I am working towards 'satva' as Parbati (2023) writes: "It is culturally believed that goodness is the highest mode, the best attribute or quality that humans can possess". It is important to note that Jack Whitehead first pointed out the importance of visual data in recognising myself as a living-contradiction in a video of his science classroom in 1972. This use of visual data was emphasised in his 1976 and 1980 papers (Whitehead, 1976; 1980).

In our current Cross-cultural Culture of Inquiry, I am learning about education in India and the issues that teachers face with pressure to teach to the test so that their students will do well. Tara makes the point in our meeting on how it is important for teachers to live according to their values and make learning meaningful for the students:



Tara on importance of teachers living their values
Preparing for CARN 2023 on the 28-08-23 with Mairin, Jackie, Tara, Michelle and Jack

https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxtvR494aoXhYWn9IpnkOcrhyYq5TxHTEe?si=4-A0fx1UY2i5o1NY

In this paper, there is also a focus on values-based inquiry where I draw on the perspectives in the recent book that Jack Whitehead and I have published:
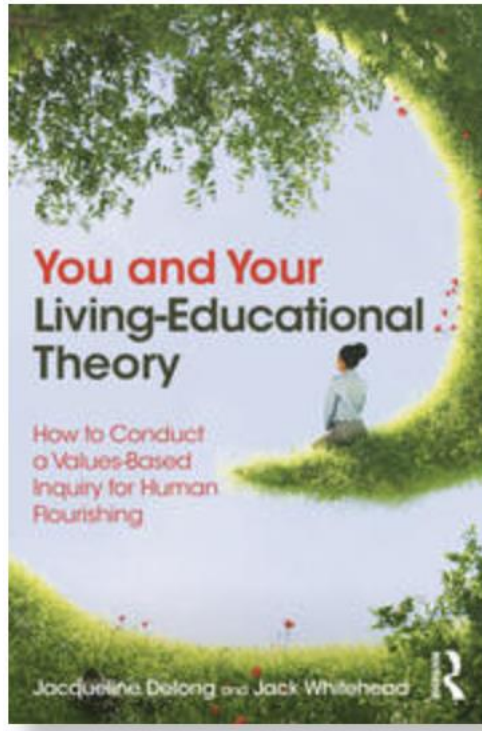
And finally, I give my perspectives and those of our group concerning the continuing concern that while teacher-researchers create exemplary research their voices are not heard and we feel a responsibility for increasing the influence of classroom teachers' research in the practical and academic worlds.

5. **Modes of inquiry**

With the members of the Culture of Inquiry, we strengthen our subjective claims through intersubjective criticism to enhance the objectivity of our claims and go beyond subjective anecdotal accounts. We use dialogue as research method (Delong, 2020) with digital visual data Whitehead, 1976; 1980). As validation groups we build in the rigor of Habermas (1976) in our values-based inquiries as global citizens. While we all have a distinctive approaches to inquiry, we share our own living-educational-theories using the Living Educational Theory Research methodology (Whitehead, 1989) with insights from Action Research (McNiff et al., 1996) and within our Cross-Cultural Culture of Inquiry (Delong, 2002).

The Living Educational Theory methodology includes:

The question: How can I improve my practice? How can I live my values more fully?
The process: Using my values to explain my influence in my life/work: Am I helping to improve the learning of these students or this organization?

The purpose: Taking responsibility for improving oneself and others and contributing to human flourishing

The methodology: Create your own living-educational-theory methodology: methodological inventiveness

The data: Includes records of all aspects of your life that are applicable to answering the question: visual, aesthetic, dialogic, narrative and auto-ethnographic.

The validation: personal, inter-subjective, validation group of peers, public accountability

## 6. Data Sources

To explain how I use my values an explanatory principles or standards of judgment, I draw from dialogue as research method and digital visual data. I focus here on two areas of my work: loving educational relationships in my mentoring and building cultures of inquiry. My learning includes increased understanding of Eastern Wisdom Traditions:  the evidence resides in my publications (Delong et al, 2022; Delong et al., 2021; Delong, 2022) and the example above from Dhungana, 2023).

When I work with mentees, we individually agree to the recording of our dialogue with further agreement required when specific dialogue is used in research publications. This is an example of dialogue as research method (Delong, 2020). Further, I ask them to assess the quality of my mentoring support for them. Here is some feedback from Lane, a very recent mentee studying with Susan Drake at Brock University, Ontario, Canada:



**Video 2.** Lane and Jackie 290823
https://youtu.be/YpHZF8UDfRo
(Delong, 2023)

Jackie: So you know there is something in it for me in terms of keeping me up to speed in the field because I need to do that to help the students and what can I do to get better at doing this.

Lane: Okay I've scribbled a lot and I'm going to take some time to reflect on my scribbling. It's actually really good that I have the video to go back to… If I had to say the biggest thing that I feel you've supported is opening my mind to what Living Theory could look like and helping me to see that I had blinders, I sort of had it in a box probably from the examples that I had read and now I see it like you said, you can make it whatever you want to make it.
The idea that I would bring on specific teachers and specific principals makes this manageable for me because I do have teachers and I do have principals that I have worked with now for a while and I know it's a long-term relationship so I know that it's something that I could actually look at long term and they could then see how they're improving which would enable me to see what I need to do to improve. So, I feel like I have a bit of a vision that I didn't have before this but the very biggest thing you did is just make me feel like I can talk to you.

In analyzing this "micro culture of inquiry" (Vaughan & Delong, 2019) in a loving educational relationship captured in the dialogue, you hear me asking for validation of my influence in my mentoring and then Lane sharing that I helped her narrow her research to make it manageable and that I am effective in my listening and responding.

I have gone beyond "reaching out" to analyzing the results of reaching out in my international mentoring to find evidence of helping others transform their lives and of my own improvement. In the next clip, Parbati shares her value of "living joy" which she uncovered when we worked together in a micro Culture of Inquiry and she created her own living-educational-theory and published her research (Dhungana, 2020). She writes,

> I continuously developed and thereby lived the Culture of Inquiry. For instance, I developed and presented the Living poster "Living joy" where I articulated the joyful, artful and playful journey Watch the 1:37 minutes YouTube video "Living joy" for detail (Dhungana, 2023a).

**Video 3:** Living Joy, a living value
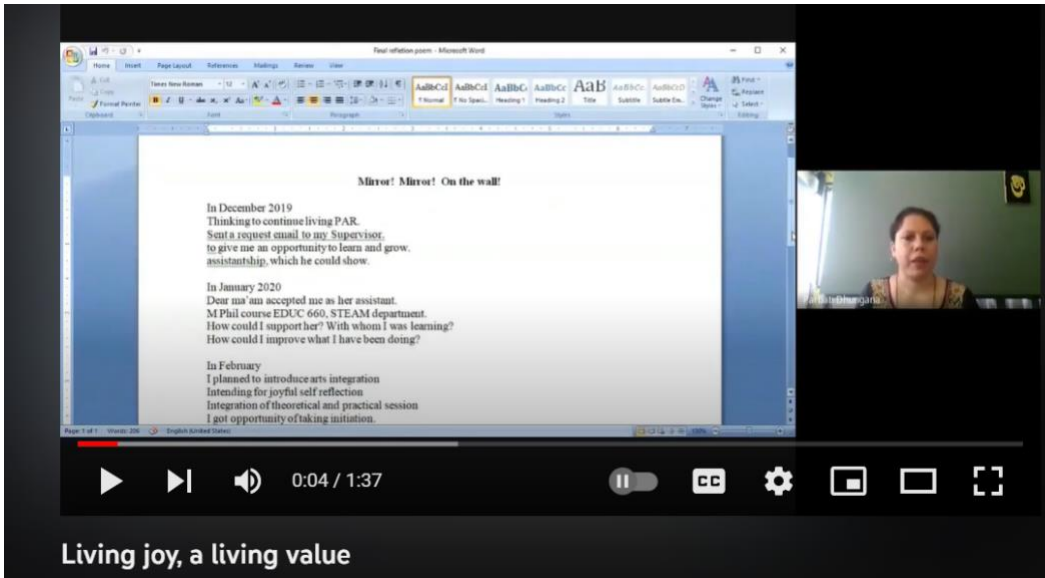
https://youtu.be/UnDsuyAA9gM
(Dhungana, 2023b)

She writes: "When I connected with others, I enhanced interdependency through cooperation and collaboration and that developed into a Culture of Inquiry enhanced through arts integration" (Dhungana, 2023)".

In this clip, Parbati shares her doctoral journey in poetry. From her I learned to add aesthetic processes to bring more joy to teaching and learning and added that to my description of a Culture of Inquiry:

The concept of a Culture of Inquiry was the result of my doctoral research (Delong, 2002) and, since that time, has evolved based on research on its efficacy with its latest amendments being the inclusion of Eastern Wisdom Traditions (Delong *et al.*, 2022). A slide (Figure 1) from my presentation at the AERA 2022 Annual Meeting shows the evolving nature of the elements of a Culture of Inquiry:

**Figure 1. Evolving nature of a Culture of Inquiry** (Delong, 2022a).

For clarification, I use the word, 'culture' in the sense that Edward Said explained it, 'a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought":

> As I use the word, 'culture' means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history…..
> Second, and almost imperceptible, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. As Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s…. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation of the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. (Said, pp. xii-xiv, 1993)

Cathy Griffin wrote,

> Successful Cultures of Inquiry in my experience have participants who are willing to be humble or fallible in their knowing and act as catalysts for the rest of the group to do the same. I have been able to be either that catalyst or facilitate the making of this process

explicit. As a catalyst I am willing to be seen as fallible and imperfect in my own practice in order to be part of the solution. (Griffin, 2013, p. 74)

Here is a short clip that shows two members of our culture of inquiry. I share some of my values and our commitment to being educationally responsible as citizen scholars and Michelle talks about the significance of being vulnerable.
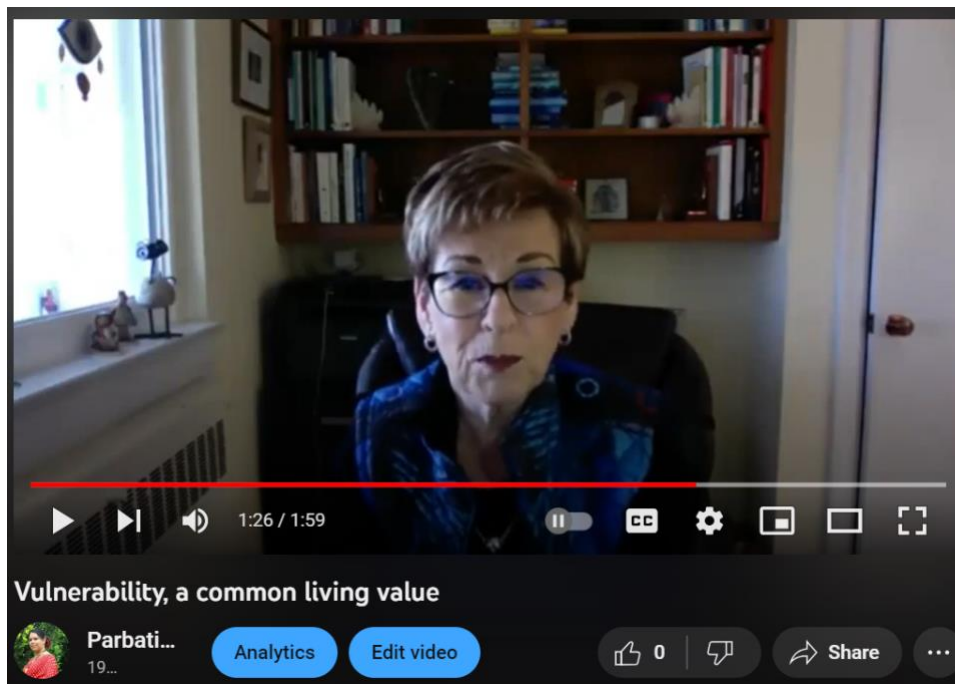


**Video 4:** Educational responsibility and Vulnerability, a common living value
https://youtu.be/H6oTNgURZbg (Dhungana, 2023c)

### 7. Results

*a) Assessing and explaining the nature of my influence as an international mentor on myself, others and social formations using my values as explanatory principles and providing data that serves as evidence of improving my practice.* I included data as evidence of my influence on myself and mentees in the data section.

I want to begin this part with clarifying with myself and others the process of using values as explanatory principles. We use our values to help us explain the nature of our influence on ourselves and others. If our value is 'inquiry' or 'culture of inquiry' or 'inquiry learning', we would be including data that students pose and answer their own questions, not the questions of the teacher. This moves out of the *transmission model* commonly found in school systems where the teacher is pressured to *cover the curriculum* so that students excel in the final evaluations such as exams used for entry to post-secondary institutions.

What does it look like when students are asking their own questions? It might be seen in a video recording of students working in groups posing questions, listening to each other and looking for creative solutions to a problem they posed. They would be seen as looking to each other for ideas and not to the teacher. They might be conducting their own action research on improving their own learning (Griffin, 2011; Campbell, 2011).

In explaining our influence in inquiry learning it is often the case that we start from the experience that we are not encouraging inquiry learning in our students as much as we want to. By first demonstrating that we are improving our practice by contributing to our students moving towards inquiry learning, we can then explain the movement by using our value of inquiry learning. Note that in order for *inquiry* to be part of the curriculum, there must be criteria for assessment of inquiry.

It is part of my regular practice to ask the mentees to help me to be a better mentor for them and others. Sometimes that data comes to me in the form of an email: On August 24, 2023, I received an email from Amy Stapleton from Dublin, Ireland explaining why I had not heard from her since 2021 (job pressures and a new baby girl). She shared that she is back working on the submission of her PhD:

> I wanted to just message you as well as I came across our videos again and wanted to thank you to really say how grateful I am for your support. Out of our conversations I got my first findings chapter written and much better drafts of other chapters, such as the theoretical chapter and the flow overall of the thesis. I am down to the final two chapters now, and while it has been a hard struggle to get here I see the finish line approaching soon(ish)! (Stapleton, 2023)

I submit that that's the nature of my influence on others and on improving my practice as I live my values of creating cultures of inquiry, building loving educational relationships and loving them into learning (Campbell, 2011).

*b. Contributing educational responses by analyzing the results of reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory Research in my international mentoring to find evidence of helping others transform their lives and of my own improvement.*

In this conference, one of the presenters, Femke Bijker, is presenting with her colleague, her current research in building better urban centres for better living: "Research into the experiences of residents of new cities with regard to liveability for the [Lectoraat Urban Innovation](.)." (Bijker, 2023). Part of my influence has been to provide support and encouragement after a disappointing experience in her doctoral program. With my support, she created her own living-educational-theory and published her results in 2021 (Bijker, 2021). In LinkedIn on September 20, 2023, she shared:

> From the Learning Lab Sense of Belonging, I will investigate and experiment whether I can make working from values - as we do in the research group with teachers in training - 'more widely' accessible to colleagues and students. The core concept is 'Living Educational Theory': from which values you work and how do you 'know' whether you do so.
>
> [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bijwaarde_per-1-september-heb-ik-bij-windesheim-veel-activity-7109962122976972800-27UU?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bijwaarde_per-1-september-heb-ik-bij-windesheim-veel-activity-7109962122976972800-27UU?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

When we talked on Teams on September 21, she was concerned that she had little influence on the formal curriculum and I said that her influence was the way she lived and taught in a values-embedded way.

*c. Contributing to increasing publication, use and referencing of classroom teachers' practitioner research.*

One of the concerns expressed by the members in our Culture of Inquiry is that the classroom teachers who research their own practice to improve the quality of teaching and learning experience consistent challenges to getting their research published, read and shared. Vaughan and her colleagues (Vaughan et al, 2023) have published the benefits of teachers researching their practice. One of the obstacles that we have experienced is that many of the smaller journals do not have the SCOPUS certification that academic institutions require for their tenure credentials.

I read the 2023 summer issue of BERA's Research Intelligence where many authors referenced the position of Stenhouse (1981), a former president of BERA, that teachers researching their own practice is at the heart of educational improvement and found many claims of valuing practitioner research but their voices did not seem to be evident. Tazreen Kassim-Lowe and Rebekah Gear feel that action research may address some of the obstacles, "can synthesise

theory and practice, and develop local solutions and critical thinking (Wiliam, 2013)". I refer to two other articles in the journal (2023, p. 14). Head Teacher, Caruthers (2023, p. 16) claims to have created a "research active school" and "Research became a slow, organic, professional development model." Lisa-Maria Müller (2023) from the Chartered College of Teaching claims, "To date, over 400 articles by teacher authors have been published across 17 issues." (p. 22) When I went into the journal *impact* at https://chartered.college/impact, the abstracts appeared to indicate academics as authors but I was unable to see the whole articles without joining the site. (p. 22)

Elizabeth Hidson (2023) poses this conundrum: A challenge for BERA is that of reciprocal research and knowledge exchange: how can this profession of local, regional, national and international practitioner researchers best be mobilised within the wider educational research environment to research, reflect and disseminate as part of the research-rich and self-improving educational system described in the introduction? (p. 27)

A recent review of teacher research by Martell et al, 2021, was interesting and revealing. They pose the position that has been part of my work for many years that teacher research upsets the traditional power hierarchy that places teachers as the consumers—not the producers—of educational research, which has long existed (Lagemann, 1997, 2000) (Martel et al., 2021, p. 400). They based their work on frameworks and research by Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1992; 1999 and in press) in order to come to three conclusions:

> First, we must reinvent the notion of professional practice in education. We must make clear that teachers have a "collective intellectual capacity to help pose the new challenges of practice and also to create the knowledge and tools to address those problems by working together in inquiry communities" (p. 6). All work with teachers must begin with this assumption.
> Second, we must create structures that involve, "deepening the local work of practitioner inquiry communities and linking that work across local communities" (p. 6). This involves the creation and support of networks of teachers. It means identifying allies in this work and sustaining teacher activism toward justice and democracy.
> Third, we need to trouble our understandings of research, which have been formed in academia to protect a hierarchical understanding of knowledge. Ultimately, this "creates issues and tensions that are at once disruptive and generative" (p. 7). Finally, we must help teachers' engagement with research connect to larger transformative agendas. (Martel et al., 2021, p. 404).

This research seems to reinforce the assessment of Vaughan (2022) that the ways and means for teachers conducting research on their practice to influence the wider academic and practical knowledge base of teaching and learning needs to improve.  As Vaughan et al., 2019 write,

> Providing a space for research that is conducted *by* and *with* teachers is key to ensuring that classroom data is well-represented when educational decisions are made. Publicly

sharing their work and highlighting the value of insider knowledge is critical in understanding the context of education today. Additionally, arming teachers with research skills is essential in the continued goal of professionalizing education (p. 138).

Smaller scale examples for addressing this problem lies in the seminal work of groups like the Network for Educational Action Research of Ireland (NEARi) where Glenn and her colleagues Sullivan, Roche, and McDonagh have created a network and publication vehicles for teacher researchers. How might that influence be extended? Part of our Culture of Inquiry dialogue on August 14, 2023 brainstormed possible ways forward and we have all taken some preliminary actions that have some potential for improving the impact of teacher-researcher on teaching and learning but much remains to be done.

## 8. Conclusions

Through their collaborative research the practitioner-researchers in our Cross-cultural Culture of Inquiry share their community generated explanations of educational influences with their values of human flourishing as they explore researching and answering their real-world questions, 'How do I/We improve my/our professional practices? They influence their students, their colleagues and their institutions. Each individual who creates her own living-educational-theory with values of human flourishing contributes as a citizen-scholar to improving our world and moving toward knowledge-wisdom. They work toward solving the second problem of learning, "our power to act *wisely.*" (Maxwell, 2019)

The power of teachers' classroom research has the potential to improve teaching and learning practices when we manage to get it into the hand of those making the difference in the classrooms- the teachers themselves. Instead of speaking for teachers, we need academics to encourage and support teacher-researchers, not speak for them. Our Culture of Inquiry members are doing just that; we hope others will do the same.

## 9. Significance

This research describes and explains how individuals can contribute to human flourishing and transforming lives by loving practitioners into learning as they create their own living-educational-theories. The relationally dynamic values, that form explanatory principles in the explanations of educational influences in learning include longitudinal research on international mentoring, professional development, dialogue as research method and Cultures of Inquiry.

I think this research is significant as well because it has allowed me to be (as noted in Marx's unpublished notes) "twice affirmed", myself and the other and "that my work satisfied a human need" (Bernstein, 1971, p, 48). Knowing that I have made a positive difference in the lives of those that I have taught, mentored and with whom I have conducted co-research gives me joy and harmony, (Dhungana, 2023). "I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love and in my individual activity I would have immediately confirmed and realized my true human nature" (ibid., p. 48).

Addendum: It is of great significance that Jack Whitehead was awarded an honorary D. Litt. at Worcester University, UK on September 12, 2023 for his contributions to educational research and educational theory:

In her citation, Ann Jordan, Provost of the University of Worcester, read,

Jack challenges all of us to see the importance of seeing teacher-researchers as knowledge creators who are generating their own living educational theories. He passionately believes in the importance of researchers bringing their own personal values to educational research and also sees the value of methodological inventiveness as each individual generates their own methodology.

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