

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

A contribution to a Symposium at the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) 2023 Conference, on October 26-28 Friends Meeting House 6 Mount Street Manchester, UK, with Jacqueline Delong, Canada; Mairín Glenn, Republic of Ireland; Michelle Vaughan, USA; Tara Ratnam, India.

Jack Whitehead, UK
University of Cumbria, UK and North West University, South Africa.

Abstract

The idea of Collective Imaginary is introduced to explore and enhance the cultural influences of Living Educational Theory Research. A view of professionalism is offered in which a professional practitioner engages in a programme of continual professional development. This includes researching their practice to: improve it, evaluate it, generate and test the validity of their accounts for their educational influences in learning (their living-educational-theories), contribute the knowledge they create to the growth of global knowledge.

A distinction is made between education research that is carried within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of forms and fields of education such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education and educational research that generates valid, evidence and values-based explanations of educational influences in learning. The educational responses are expressed as living-educational-theories in which practitioner-researchers explain 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. The real-world questions are of the form, 'How do I improve my professional practice in education with values of human flourishing. Digital visual data with a method of empathetic resonance are used to clarify and communicate the relationally dynamic values used by individuals and communities in different cultural contexts to explain their educational influences in learning in contributing to the global knowledge-base of education. The epistemological implications for these contributions to educational knowledge are considered in terms of the units of appraisal, standards of judgement and living-logics of the explanations of educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing from different cultural contexts and cultures of inquiry.

Introduction

The educational responses to reaching out to people and communities, with Action and Living Educational Theory Research, are grounded in assumptions about being a member of a profession and being professional, and a distinction between education research and educational research. The idea of Collective Imaginary is introduced to explore the global

and cultural implications of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development.

I understand a member of a profession to be an individual who has fulfilled the criteria of being a member of a profession. I understand being a professional as involving a continuing process of professional learning and development in exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?' Being a professional involves the generation of educational knowledge in this exploration and contributing the knowledge created to a global professional knowledgebase of education.

Education research is research carried out within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validity of forms and fields of education knowledge such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, politics, economics, leadership and administration of education. Educational Research is research that generates valid, evidence and values-laden explanations (living-educational-theories) of an individual practitioner's 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.

The educational responses are focused on supporting the generation of living-educational-theories in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice in education with values of human flourishing?'. Globally, reference is made to educational responses to reaching out to people and communities with Living Educational Theory Research in relation to the planning process for the 4th International Conference on Transformative Education Research and Sustainable Development (Indonesia group, 2023; TERSD, 2023).

Two assumptions in this paper are that:

- i) Education is a values-laden practical activity
- ii) Explanations of educational influence include the use of values as explanatory principles of learning, with values of human flourishing.

The point that 'what is educational' (DeLong & Whitehead, 2023; Whitehead & Huxtable 2023), includes learning with values of human flourishing, is that not all learning is educational. History is full of examples of individuals and societies learning to negate values of human flourishing. One example of this is what was happening in the year of my birth, 1944. The world was at war, concentration camps were committing crimes against humanity. Hence the assumption of this contribution, that what is educational must include learning with values of human flourishing and not just learning.

Another assumption is that in asking, researching and answering the question 'How do I improve my professional practice in education with values of human flourishing?', the 'I' in the question exists as a living contradiction. The inclusion of 'I' as a living contradiction in a knowledge-claim led Ilyenkov in his work on Dialectical Logic (1977) to ask:

If any object is a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it? Can and should an objective contradiction find reflection in thought? And if so, in what form? (p. 313)

These questions about living contradictions prompted me, in the 1980s (Whitehead, 1985, 1989) to create the idea that living-educational-theories emerge as explanations of educational influences in learning from responding to one's recognition of being living contradictions in one's professional practice.

In the process of improving practice from the experience of existing as living-contradictions with values of human flourishing, action reflection cycles (Glenn, et al. 2023; Vaughan et al. 2019) are used in the generation of living-educational-theories. By this I mean that the process of improving practice includes expressing concerns when values are not being lived as fully as they could be, imagining ways to improve practice and choosing an action plan to act on, acting and gathering data on which to make an evidence-based judgement on the effectiveness of the actions, evaluating the actions in terms of their effectiveness, modifying the concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluation; creating and sharing a valid, evidence and values-laden explanation of educational influences in learning. The living contradictions are related to Craig's (2023) use of Schwab's idea of best-loved self and to Ratnam's (2021) idea of excessive entitlement. This paper explores the educational implications of living contradictions when an individual's excessive entitlement engages with their best-loved self.

Supporting the generation of living-educational-theories includes a process of validation that is grounded in the mutual rational controls of critical discussion (Popper, 1975, p. 44). These critical discussions support the generation of living-educational-theories in inquiries that seek to enhance the comprehensibility, evidence, sociocultural and sociohistorical understandings and authenticity (Habermas, 1976, pp. 1-2) of the explanations of educational influences in learning.

The process of enhancing the influence of Living Educational Theory Research includes the recognition of cultural influences in spreading ideas. DeLong's (2002) idea of a culture of inquiry is used in educational responses to support the generation of living-educational-theories in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice in education with values of human flourishing?'. These responses are shown in symposium contributions at the 2021, 2022 and 2023 Conferences of the American Educational Research Association (DeLong et al; 2021, 2022a & 2023) with themes that focus on educational responsibility, equity, consequential education research, and in symposium contributions at the 2022 Conference of the Collaborative Action Research Network (DeLong, 2022b) with the theme of changing lives.

Digital visual data, with empathetic resonance and dialogue is used to clarify and communicate the meanings of the embodied expression of values of human flourishing that are used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. Epistemological implications are focused on the relationally dynamic values used in the units of appraisal, standards of judgement and living-logics of explanations of educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing. The idea of Collective Imaginary is

used to connect these explanations with a collective movement to enhance the flow of these values in the living-educational-theories that are contributing to the creation of a more humane world.

Making a contribution to the global knowledgebase of professional educators with a Collective Imaginary.

This contribution to the Symposium at CARN 2023 is being made with myself, Jack Whitehead, UK; Jacqueline Delong, Canada; Mairín Glenn, Republic of Ireland; Michelle Vaughan, USA; Tara Ratnam, India. These are in the image below from the top left clockwise are Jacqueline, Jack, Mairin, Michelle and Tara.



CARN 2024 symposium planning conversation on the 2nd October 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMhfRgmt5sM> (This should read CARN 2023 symposium)

At the heart of this paper is the idea of a Collective Imaginary from Dewell and Larsson (2019). They believe that the way we see and interpret the world, through our Collective Imaginary, influences our meaning-making and what we think is important and valuable:

These “values” shape the decisions we make both individually and collectively and, in turn, the way history evolves. They also believe that we create our Collective Imaginary (consciously or unconsciously) and at the same time our Collective Imaginary determines the way our world evolves... What is required is for us to deliberately and consciously support the emergence of a new and more complex Collective Imaginary. (pp. 66-67)

I am beginning my clarification of what I understand to be my contribution to a Collective Imaginary with a response to the image above that was taken from a 26:42 minute video of a planning conversation on the 2nd October for CARN 2023.

My values of human flourishing are focused on a flow of life-affirming energy and a productive orientation to life and work. I use Fromm's (1960) distinction between a productive and a marketing orientation:

...if a person can face the truth without panic they will realise that there is no purpose to life other than that which they create for themselves through their loving relationships and productive work (p.18).

In defining productive work I use the response that Bernstein (1971, p. 48) gave to the question, 'What is it to produce something as a human being?' from the early writings of Marx. In producing something as a human being we twice affirmed ourselves and the other. In my production of my living-educational-theory I objectify my individuality and uniqueness and in the course of the activity I enjoy an individual life. I experience the individual joy of knowing my personality as an objective, sensuously perceptible, and indubitable power. In your use of insights from my living-educational-theory, my product, I have the direct and conscious satisfaction that my work has satisfied a human need and that it has objectified human nature with my values of human flourishing. I am affirmed in your thought as well as your love. In my individual life I have influenced the creation of your life. In my individual activity, in generating and sharing my living-educational-theory, I immediately confirm and realise my true human nature.

I am making a distinction between my lexical definitions of meaning and my ostensive expressions of meaning. In the above paragraph I am using lexical definitions of meaning in which the meanings of words are defined in terms of other words. By starting with the above image and video of a planning meeting for this symposium I am starting with the embodied expressions of meanings in the creation of a Collective Imaginary with flows of life-affirming energy and the values of human flourishing in the creation and sharing of living-educational-theories. I include the following ideas within my contribution to the creation of a Collective Imaginary.

Professionalism

I make a distinction between being a member of a profession and being a profession. In 1967, on my initial teacher education course, I submitted a special study on 'The Way to Professionalism in Education' (Whitehead, 1967). This included the following criteria for being a member of a profession:

1. A long period of specialized training.
2. A broad range of autonomy for both the individual practitioners and for the occupational group as a whole.
3. An acceptance by the practitioners of broad personal responsibility for judgments made and acts performed within the scope of professional autonomy.

4. A comprehensive self-governing organization of practitioners (Fischer & Thomas, 1965, p. 325)

I continue to use these criteria to distinguish a member of a profession. I use the following ideas to distinguish being a profession. Being a professional involves accepting responsibility for one's own professional learning and development in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?'. It includes researching one's own professional learning and making public the knowledge that is created in contributing to a global knowledgebase of education. In all the presentations at this Symposium we are taking responsibility for our own professional learning and making public the knowledge-claims we are making. Hence I claim that we are all professionals.

Educational Research and Education Research

As we share our explanations for our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which our practices are located, we are making a distinction between Educational Research and Education Research. We understand educational research to be research which generates valid, evidence and values-laden explanations of educational influences in one's own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. We understand education research to be research carried out within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the forms and fields of education such as the philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, economics, politics and administration of education. Educational Researchers draw insights from Education Researchers in the generation of their living-educational-theories.

Global educational knowledgebase

In contributing to a global educational knowledgebase I am introducing the idea of a Collective Imaginary to distinguish the contributions of Living Educational Theory Research to this knowledgebase. The Collective Imaginary is grounded in values of human flourishing that flow with life-affirming energy, as expressed in the above video, and a productive orientation to life, work and research that includes the generation and sharing of living-educational-theories. Whilst the last sentence is lexical in the sense that it is constituted by words alone, I am asking you to reflect on the meanings I am seeking to communicate with the help of the digital visual data and the presentations of all the contributors to this symposium. I am hoping to make available a video of the presentations, together with a co-created analysis following the symposium. Our Collective Imaginary rests on our embodied values as these are expressed in the relational dynamic between us and in what we have produced and shared as our living-educational-theories.

Values of human flourishing, best loved self, living contradictions, excessive entitlement

At the heart of our Collective Imaginary are our values of human flourishing. My own values include my best-loved self (Craig et al., 2023). In my meanings of my best-loved self I am referring to the experience of a flow of life-affirming energy that accompanies the experience of producing something that embodies values of human flourishing and enables others to do so too in the generation of living-educational-theories.

Whilst the idea of being a living-contradiction might sound negative, I experience living-contradictions as creative and positive. I first saw myself as a living contradiction when I watched a video of a science lesson in 1972 when I believed that I had established inquiry learning with my pupils. The video showed that I was unintentionally giving my pupils the questions, rather than eliciting the questions from my pupils. Whilst I felt embarrassed in seeing this, my imagination immediately started to work to create ways in which I could improve my practice and establish inquiry learning with my pupils. Over the next few weeks I acted on the ideas and moved further forward in establishing inquiry learning. This is what I mean by responses to living contradictions being creative and positive.

My experiences of being a living contradiction are also grounded in a tension between my best-loved self and my experience of excessive entitlements (Ratnam & Craig, 2021). I have benefitted from excessive entitlements in the economic, political, health and educational contexts that have influenced by life and learning. I am using excessive entitlements in the relative sense of entitlements I have received when compared with the majority of the world's population. I could feel guilty in my recognition of these excessive entitlements. However, I do not. I like the way Charles (2007) introduces the ideas of guiltless recognition and societal re-identification in facing and seeking to overcome living contradictions. I am sure that I could always do more in contributing to the enhancement of the flow of values of human flourishing in living a productive life and helping others to do so too. However, I continue to seek a balance between what my father called 'sins of commission' – that is taking on too much, and remaining healthy, happy and productive! In my acceptance of a recent award of a D.Litt. degree from the University of Worcester (Whitehead, 2023) I think that you will see me continuing to express my life-affirming energy with the pleasure of living a productive life as a global citizen professionally engaged in education.

Living-educational-theories, Living Educational Theory Research

I make a clear distinction between a living-educational-theory and Living Educational Theory Research. A living-educational-theory is an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation within which their practice is located. Living Educational Theory Research is a conceptual framework that defines the paradigm from within which living-educational-theories are generated and shared. The distinction is important in established that an individual's living-educational-theory is not derived from the conceptual framework of Living Educational Theory Research. Each individual is responsible for creating and sharing their own living-educational-theory. In most disciplines an explanation for an individual case that is within the theory is 'derived' from the general theoretical framework. This is not the case in Living Educational Theory Research. The individual's explanation is not derived from a general theoretical framework. The explanation is generating by the individual to explain their own educational influences in learning.

Dr. Máirín Glenn, a contributor to this symposium, is passionate about self-study action research and living theory. In her living-poster at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/mairin20.pdf>, Glenn expresses her conviction of their power as a means, not only of enhancing practice but also, of taking action and engaging in research to generate theory in the process. Glenn explains that her values form the foundations of her practice and establish the over-arching principles towards which she aspires. They become the explanatory principles by which her research can be evaluated

and validated. Glenn values holistic ways of coming to know, that embrace social justice, fairness, inclusion and care. Glenn sees herself as a knowledge generator along with others. Whilst I will need to check the validity of the following claim with Glenn I see Glenn as contributing to a new Collective Imaginary through her expression of a flow of life-affirming energy with values of human flourishing. These values include living a productive life in generating and contributing her living-educational-theory to the new Collective Imaginary in a culture of inquiry.

Dr. Michelle Vaughan, another contributor to this symposium, focuses her educational responses, to reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory Research, on enhancing the educational voices of practitioners in the generating of the global knowledgebase of education. This contribution is consistent with the CARN 2020 Symposium on 'Raising Voices Using Dialogue as Research Method in Living Theory Cultures of Inquiry' (DeLong et al. 2020). In communicating meanings of a flow of life-affirming energy with values of human flourish I direct your attention to a video of a presentation by Jacqueline DeLong and Michelle Vaughan at an international conference.

1.25 minute video from a workshop with DeLong and Vaughan at the 2019 Conference of the Action Research Network of the Americas – see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dUZiYWtSGXU>



I will check the validity of my claim with DeLong and Vaughan as I claim that they are expressing a flow of life-affirming energy with values of human flourishing that include the generation of their living-educational-theories within a culture of inquiry that is contributing to a new Collective Imagining.

Validation, Rigour, Cultural Influences, Culture of Inquiry

As in all research that is making a contribution to knowledge, validation is important in ensuring that a knowledge-claim is justified and true. In Living Educational Theory Research validation is based on what Popper (1975) refers to as the mutual rational controls of critical discussion. In research there is often a tension between objectivity and subjectivity. Popper recognized that objectivity could be enhanced through intersubjective criticism. In Living Educational Theory Research, intersubjective criticism is often exercised in validation groups of some 3-8 peers to enhance the validity of a living-educational-theory. This criticism can be focused on four criteria of social validity that owe much to Habermas' (1976) criteria in communication and the evolution of society. These have been amended in the questions asked by a Living Educational Theory Researcher of a validation group:

How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?

How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the knowledge-claim of my explanation?

How could I extend and deepen my sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of their influences in my explanation?

How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing that I am living my values as fully as possible?

Some Living Educational Theory Researchers may prefer rigour over validation. Winters (1989) prefers rigour. Kok (1991) uses Winters' six principles of rigour to enhance the rigour of her living-educational-theory. These six principles are dialectical and reflexive critique, risk, plural structure, multiple resource, theory-practice transformation.

Whilst using Wittgenstein's (1953) insight that the meanings of the words we use are influenced by the context of their use, I am aware of the importance of taking cultural influences, in particular contexts, into account. I use Said's (1993) insights into the meaning of culture. For Said, '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. Said says that these often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. He includes, 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, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought (Said, pp. xii-xiv).

In contributing to the creation of a new Collective Imaginary based on a flow of life-affirming energy and productive forms of life, with values of human flourishing, I am seeking to contribute to the generation of a cultural influence that becomes a refining and elevating element in the global influences of Living Educational Theory Research. I understand this present paper as an educational response to reaching out to people and communities with Action and Living Educational Theory Research. In contributing to this influence, I am putting forward this new Collective Imaginary as a contribution to developing Delong's (2002, 2022) idea and practice of a culture of inquiry, in this symposium. I am suggesting that Living Educational Theory Researchers hold themselves to account for contributing, a new Collective Imaginary, to a culture of inquiry. This means that each researcher will contribute their living-educational-theory, with values of human flourishing, to a global knowledgebase, as part of the generation of a culture of inquiry that includes this new Collective Imaginary.

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