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Why a focus on 'what is educational?' matters so much in reconstructing education?

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an argument as to why a focus on 'What is educational?' matters so much in reconstructing education. Living Educational Theory Research is presented as an approach that enables professional, educational-practitioners to contribute to reconstructing education locally and globally. The research is focused on the generation and testing the validity of living-educational-theories through researching questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice in education?' Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner, self-study educational 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 the practice is located. Research accounts are subjected to the mutual rational control of critical discussion with peers. This criticism strengthens the research, by enhancing the validity of the knowledge claims. It contributes to the reconstruction of education using an educational lens in determining what matters in reconstructing education. This extends the idea that education is focused on the transmission of knowledge. It extends it by including the knowledge-creating capacities of each individual. The conclusions concern the importance of an 'educational' lens in understanding what matters in reconstructing education.

Introduction

Our answer to the question, 'Why a focus on 'What is educational?' matters so much in reconstructing education?' is focused on the idea that what is educational involves more than the transmission of knowledge. It involves the knowledge-creating capacities of individuals in learning to life satisfying, productive and worthwhile lives. Our understanding of 'productivity' is not grounded in a specifically capitalist meaning that Fromm describes as a 'marketing personality'. Fromm (1960) says that 'if a person can face the truth without panic they will realise that there is no purpose to life other than

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that which they create for themselves through their loving relationships and productive work' (18).

Our meaning is consistent with Fromm's description of a 'productive personality'. It is also consistent with Bernstein's description of what it means to produce something as a human being. Drawing on the early writings of Marx, Bernstein (1971, 48) says that in this production we are twice affirmed. We affirm ourselves in producing something that includes the values we use to give meaning and purpose to our lives. We are also affirming through another's use of what we produce in giving meaning and purpose to their life.

We believe adopting a professional approach to our practice includes holding ourselves to account for our practice and contributing to a global professional knowledge-base. Adopting a professional approach to our practice as educational-practitioners and educators includes continually researching our values-led practice to understand, explain and improve it in order, as Eisner (1993, 10) says, 'We do research to understand. We try to understand in order to make our schools better places for both the children and the adults who share their lives there'. We go further than Eisner and say that we do educational research in order to make this world, and not just our schools, a better place to be for all.

We have each spent our adult years employed as professional educational-practitioners and educators by English schools, universities and local education authorities. These organisations had the raison d'être of providing educational opportunities, experience and relationships for children, young people and adults and contributing to the development and implementation of associated local and national policies. Our employment as public servants not only enabled us to earn a living it also enabled us to live lives we felt were productive, worthwhile and satisfying. What gave us satisfaction was a belief that our educational practice was contributing to improving the learning of individuals, communities and Humanity to flourish with humane values in the complex ecology of our diverse interconnected world. We stress the importance of humane values as history is full of examples of crimes against humanity where values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity are negated. We were employed as these organisations were gradually being transformed by central governments from providing a public service to market serving businesses and reconstructing education accordingly. Since our paid employment contracts were terminated we have both continued to employ ourselves as professional educational-practitioners and educators. Whitehead had to retire because he reached 65. Huxtable was made redundant because of job cuts in the Local Authority. We continue with our productive work because we continue to want to contribute to the reconstruction of education to serve the needs of Humanity facing the challenges of learning to flourish in an ever increasingly complex and inter-related world. We believe we can make a contribution by focussing the attention of professionals, such as teachers, on the importance of continually trying to answer questions such as, 'What is the educational purpose of education and how am I contributing to reconstructing education to realise its educational purpose?' Amirault and Branson (2006), illustrate the practical implications of clarifying the purposes of education. They contrast the values that make on wise, virtuous and in harmony with truth, with sets of practical abilities that relate to skills rather than values.

> We witness in the ancient context two unfolding views toward expertise, each vested in a philosophical view of the nature and purpose of education. If one subscribed to the notion that education held innate worth and that its goal was the development of the 'inner man' (as did Socrates and Plato), then 'expertise' could be seen as the attainment of a general set of inner traits that made one wise, virtuous, and in harmony with truth. If one subscribed to the value of applied skills development (as did the Sophists), then 'expertise' could be viewed as the attainment of a set of comprehensive practical abilities. (72)

Successive British governments have focussed on reconstructing education as training to equip a workforce with a set of comprehensive practical abilities to meet the demands of the employment market. Research is supported to improve the cost effectiveness of schools, colleges and universities to serve that purpose and metrics have been developed to monitor the output. It is important that people are equipped with comprehensive practical abilities but not only to earn a living.

People also need to be equipped with the abilities to develop inner traits that make 'one wise, virtuous, and in harmony with truth' which enable them to realise their responsibilities to the local, national and international communities they are part of. Education also has an emancipating purpose as Shaull describes in his foreword to Freire's (1972) 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed':

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. (14)

Instruction is important at times, and the transmission of knowledge created by previous generations has a place in education. Traditional standards and forms of representation may be appropriate for monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of the instructional procedures and strategies used. However, we do not believe that the sole purpose of education is to provide cost-effective skills training or efficient transmission of information. We are emphasising the importance of including, within the reconstruction of education, the values of human flourishing that distinguish education as a values-laden practical activity from a solely skills based approach to learning.

Like Oancea and Pring (2008, 29) we believe that, 'Deliberations over the aims of education are essentially moral – concerning the qualities and virtues, the capabilities and understandings that, under the banner of 'education', are thought worth promoting'. The sense of person and the complexity of the contexts are lost in the relentless focus on improving instruction to raise test scores, which provide evidence of learning at the lower levels of Bloom's (1956) hierarchy. Bell (1998) put this well:

> We often do not take ourselves seriously; often we do not reflect adequately upon our social context (the baggage we bring in and bring in and the contrast which we perceive) and we have problems in recognising the complexity of the environmental context …

> Reality is complex and no single view will be adequate to explain the nature of the complexity within and around us.

In quoting Donald Schön, Chambers (1997 p.190) says,

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he [*sic*] remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigour, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems and non-rigorous enquiry?

The evolving paradigm turns this on its head, as Schön perhaps would wish. His high ground describes the conditions of normal professionalism, but a new professionalism is taking over. The imagery is upended: the swamp becomes the new high ground:

> In the new paradigm of understanding, the 'swamp' or mess becomes the primary ground of understanding and learning. The challenges for the researcher grow; the sense of vulnerability and anxiety (as well as excitement) grows. Non-self-reflective practitioners have for many years focused on the manageable and the limited type of problem on which their discipline focuses … ' (181–182)

White (2007) also clearly presents the challenge all professional educators and educational practitioners should face themselves with and why. Living Educational Theory Research (Whitehead 1989a, 1989b) offers a practical, educational, generative and transformational approach a practitioner, such as a teacher, can adopt to improve their professional development. By focussing on 'what is educational' they not only enhance their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations, they also contribute to reconstructing education to serve the purposes of individuals, communities and Humanity learning to bring into being a world where humanity can flourish rather than destroying ourselves and our planet.

We draw evidence from the living-educational-theories of professional educators at https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml to show that this is not an impossible utopian dream but a reality and already happening where (i) an 'educational' lens is being used to reconstruct education and; (ii) professional educators are accepting ethical responsibility for what they do, researching their own values-laden practice to understand, improve and explain it and generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theories and contributing their educational knowledge to a global knowledgebase of education.

Background

Our aim is to contribute to reconstructing education as a life-long values-laden process of learning to live a satisfying productive and worthwhile life for self and others. Our objectives are focused on the educational implications of generating and testing the validity of accounts of Living Educational Theory Research as contributions to a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity. They include the clarification and communication of the meanings of educational values, as they emerge in the course of an educational practitioner researching their practice to understand, improve and explain

it and create valid explanations of educational influences in learning. These accounts are contributing to a global educational knowledge base for the benefit of all. In these accounts the embodied values of the educational-practitioner, form the explanatory principles in their explanations of their educational influence in their own learning to improve their educational practice, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations that form the context of their practice.

Evidence for the academic legitimation of Living Educational Theory Research by universities around the world can be seen in the doctoral theses, freely available at https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml.

Context

Global context of the research

The global context of our research into 'Why a focus on 'What is educational?' matters so much in reconstructing education?' can be appreciated by viewing the living-posters of Living Educational Theory Researchers at https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf. These include the living-posters of researchers in the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) and those of practitioner researchers from many countries including colleagues we are researching with from South Africa, India, Malaysia and Mongolia. We are also aware of the global influences, on what counts as educational research, of research organisations such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Publications from BERA, and AERA illustrate the limitations and implications of using the lens of education research to reconstruct education.

The December 2021 issue of BERJ includes a special section on 'Close to Practice Research' with contributions from Biesta and Aldridge (2021), Dominic et al. (2021), Hordern (2021), Takayama and Nishioka (2021), Wyse et al. (2021). Our analysis provides an evidence-based argument to justify the claim that the contributions to the special section of BERJ (2021) are not close enough to researching educational practice, that is, their own, to generate the valid explanations of educational influences in learning that are needed to constitute education*al* theory and to reconstruct education. We argue that the logic and language of the contributors reinforces the mistake in the Disciplines Approach to Educational Theory, recognised by Hirst (1983), in replacing the practical principles used by educators to explain their educational practices, by principles from the disciplines approach. This mistake was compounded by Whitty (2005) in his Presidential Address to BERA where he advocated a change in BERA's name to the British Education Research Association. One of the unintended consequences of such a move could be to subvert the reconstruction of education as an educational process by reinforcing a view of education as provide skilled workers for the market. The focus of this process in the UK is usually attributed to James Callaghan, a UK Labour Prime Minister (1976–1979) (Callaghan 1976).

The following paper from members of the Self-study of Teacher Education Practices SIG of AERA was presented, by Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2021), on 'A transcontinental tapestry: Co-creativity in polyvocal self-study research' at the 2021 AERA:

> We share the design and development of our transcontinental tapestry, which emerged from our individual and collaborative work in facilitating transdisciplinary self-study learning communities. Found poetry and a portfolio of our work in co-creativity served to deepen our understanding of collective creativity in polyvocal self-study and contribute to poetic self- study scholarship. After several interplays, we created a tapestry poem that captured the essence of our co-creativity in self-study research. Overall, the paper illuminates that making time and space to be playful together is essential to the process of discovery and a powerful portal for mutual learning and innovation. This work serves as an invitation to others to explore how polyvocal, co-creative spaces prompt non-linear pathways for learning and professional development. (Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras 2021, 1)

Whilst agreeing with the topic of 'co-creativity in polyvocal self-study research, and of the importance of involving transcontinental voices', we are seeking to go beyond the metaphor of a 'tapestry'. We do this by presenting the living-educational-theories of participants as their valid, evidence and values-based explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding.

Charles (2007) goes beyond the metaphor of a 'tapestry' and shows what the reconstruction of education means, using an educational lens in practice, as he brings 'Ubuntu' as a living standard of judgment into the Academy.

The need to focus on what is educational, in reconstructing education, is vividly demonstrated by the wars raging between and within communities who are part of the complex inter-related ecologies that comprise Humanity's world. The most recent Russia-Ukraine conflagration involves 'Powers' with the capability to destroy not only other countries but also our planet many times over. Reconstructing education with a focus on what is educational holds hope for individuals and communities to learn to get their own needs met and help others to do so too, so that Humanity can learn to flourish in the complex ecology we inhabit and are part of. In working on reconstructing education, to serve the needs individuals, communities and Humanity have to learn to live together peaceably. This is of global concern and has been underway for many years. For example, the *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4* was created and signed up to by organisations, nations and individuals coming together:

> UNESCO together with UNICEF, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women and UNHCR organized the World Education Forum 2015 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 19–22 May 2015, hosted by the Republic of Korea. Over 1,600 participants from 160 countries, including over 120 Ministers, heads and members of delegations, heads of agencies and officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and representatives of civil society, the teaching profession, youth and the private sector, adopted the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, which sets out a new vision for education for the next fifteen years. (UNESCO 2015)

Living Educational Theory Researchers: Potts (2012); Coombs, Potts, and Whitehead (2014); Qutoshi (2016; 2018); Charles (2007); Briganti (2021); Rawal (2006), focus on 'what is educational?', and have been contributing to the global reconstruction of education as:

> … a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies. (https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4)

The focus of UNESCO requires education to empower people with knowledge, skills and values. The

focus on 'What is educational?' matters so much, in reconstructing education, because of the priority given to individuals generating and sharing their own explanations of their educational influences in learning. We hope we are being clear that the focus of UNESCO is on education empowering people whilst our focus is on the generation and sharing of the explanations of educational influences in learning that individuals produce as part of their empowerment.

Local context of the research

The local context of this paper is that of The Educational Studies Association of Ireland and the 2022 ESAI conference:

> A primary aim of the ESAI is to ensure, as far as possible, that educational discourse in Ireland remains grounded in perspectives which are adequately acquainted with the evidence from the various disciplines of educational research and that educational policy-making at all levels remains similarly informed by arguments which are educationally sound. http://esai.ie/about-esai/

The conference organisers of the ESAI Conference, 2022, with the theme 'Reconstructing Education: what matters?' welcomed papers that consider what matters in reconstructing education through a variety of lenses. 'These include (but are not limited to) sociological, pedagogical, historical, religious, ethical, technological, philosophical, political and economic'. The list of lenses does not include an 'educational' lens. As we have previously indicated, this omission is also common to other organisations concerned with educational matters, such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). It is an omission we wish to try to address in this paper by clarifying the nature and implications of using an educational lens to determine what matters in reconstructing 'education' and foregrounding the work of, for example, members of the Values Based Practitioner Action Research (VPAR) ESAI Special Interest Group.

Education has many meanings, for example schooling and training. The meaning we are giving to what is educational here is that of a values-laden life-long process of learning to live a productive and worthwhile life for self and others. This is a process of learning to contribute to the flourishing of our own humanity and that of others. It is a process of contributing to the learning of Humanity, as a global social formation, which transcends time and place to flourish. Hence the importance we are giving to creating an 'educational lens' in focusing on what matters when reconstructing education. The case we are making is that any analysis of transforming practice, that omits a focus on values that constitute what is educational, is unlikely to lead to an educational reconstruction of education, which enables the humanity of individuals, communities and Humanity to flourish in a humane world. Examples of local research that focus on educational research in reconstructing education have been provided by members of the Network

Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) and the VPAR ESAI Special Interest Group, such as those by Glenn, McDonagh, Sullivan and Roach:

Methodology and methods

Living educational theory research methodology

Many researchers follow Creswell's (2007) claim that a researcher must chose a methodology and then apply it in the research. This is not the methodological approach in Living Educational Theory Research. It is important to recognise that a distinguishing quality of this research is that individuals generate their own living-educational-theory methodology in the course of researching to understand and improve their educational practice. In this research they generate a valid, evidence and values-based 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. The explanations usually emerge from explorations of the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice?' In developing their living-educational-theory methodology, researchers clarify and communicate the meanings of the embodied values they use as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence. This clarification and communication can now make use of digital visual data with a process of empathetic resonance (Whitehead 2010).

Validity is also an important quality in developing a living-educational-theory methodology and the following insights are used to strengthen the validity of the evidence and values-based explanations of educational influences in learning. These insights are used in validation groups of some 3–8 peers who subject the explanations to the rational controls of critical discussion. We use Popper's (1975, 44) idea on the importance of enhancing the objectivity of explanations through inter-subjective testing. He emphasises that this involves the use of the mutual rational control of critical discussion. We use this control in validation groups. Criteria of social validity are used drawing on a modification of Habermas (1976) four criteria of social validity in the following four questions to enhance the validity of explanations:

  (i) How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
 (ii) How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my explanations?
(iii) How could I deepen and extend the sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of their influences in my explanation?
(iv) How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in showing that I am living my values as fully as I can?

Methods

The methods include the use of:

  (i) Action-reflection cycles – These involve expressing a concern; imagining possibilities for improving practice; choosing an action plan; acting and gathering data to make an evidence-based judgements on the influences of actions; evaluating the influence of actions; modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the

evaluations; generating and sharing a valid explanation of educational influence in the learning of people and social formations to realise life-affirming and life-enhancing values in practice.

These cycles were used by: Whitehead (1999a) in his doctoral thesis on 'How do I improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry'; Huxtable (2012) in her doctoral thesis on 'How do I evolve living-educational-theory praxis in living-boundaries; Bognar and Zovco (2008) in their research on 'Pupils as action researchers, improving something important in our lives.

(ii) Dialogue – Much education and educational influences in learning takes place through dialogue, either internal dialogues with oneself, or externally with others. Data from dialogues can be used as evidence to show one individual's educational in the learning of another (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014; MacInnis and Portelli 2002; Whitehead 1999b).

Delong (2002) used dialogue as a research method in her doctoral thesis on the creation of her living-educational-theory as a Superintendent of Schools contributing to a culture of inquiry within a Canadian context.

(iii) Narrative – A living-educational-theory is a narrative (Squire, Andrews, and Tamboukou 2008; Wolgemuth and Agosto 2019) that includes an evidence and values-based explanation of educational influence in learning. In presenting a narrative we bear in mind, Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) point about validity criteria for narrative inquiry:We think a variety of criteria, some appropriate to some circumstances and some to others, will eventually be the agreed-upon norm. It is currently the case that each inquirer must search for and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work.

In using narrative as a research method we are also bearing in mind Taleb's (2010) point:

> You need a story to displace a story. Metaphors and stories are far more potent (alas) than ideas; they are also easier to remember and more fun to read. If I have to go after what I call the narrative disciplines, my best tool is a narrative. Ideas come and go, stories stay. (p.xxi)

Campbell (2018) used this approach in her doctoral thesis on 'How has love influenced me as a teacher researcher and learner? A narrative inquiry into a teacher's abrupt awakenings. Briganti (2021) also used this approach in her doctoral thesis on 'My living-theory of International Development'. This included her work in Afghanistan. The approach was also used by Qutoshi (2016) in his doctoral thesis on 'Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A journal towards transformative teacher education in Pakistan.

(iv) Empathetic resonance with Digital visual data – Because the explanatory principles in a living-educational-theory are values-based it is important to clarify and communicate the meanings of these values as they are embodied and expressed in educational practice. Whilst lexical definitions of the meanings of value-words are

helpful in clarifying and communicating the meanings of values, the embodied expressions of meaning requires ostensive expressions of meaning for a more comprehensive communication of the meanings. This is where the method of empathetic resonance with digital visual data (Whitehead 2010) helps with the clarification and communication of the expression of the meanings of embodied values.

Naidoo (2005) used this method in her doctoral thesis on the emergence of a living-theory of inclusional and responsive practice, as she clarified her embodied meanings of an expression of a passion for compassion with an Altzeihmer's patient and her carer.

(a) Validation – The validity and rigour of the values and evidence-based explanations is ensured by applying Popper's (1975, 44) idea of the mutual rational controls of critical discussion within the validation groups described above. These focused on strengthening the comprehensibility, evidence, socio-cultural and socio-historical understandings and authenticity of the explanations, in terms of the practitioner-researchers' espoused values being lived as fully as possible.

(b) Ethics – 'Ethics' is a big issue for practitioners researching their practice. When using the words of others it is important to gain written ethical permissions prior to using their words.

It is important to comply with the ethical regulations and guidelines of the institution they work for or study with. Ethical guidelines are usually published on the institution's website. Ethical guidelines for educational researchers are also available from the websites of the Network for Educational Action Research Ireland and the British and American Educational Research Associations.

Data and analysis

Data is analysed to illustrate the implications for educational research to contribute to the reconstruction of education as a values-laden process. Attention has been drawn, in the preceding section to the method of empathetic resonance with digital visual data for clarifying and communicating the meanings of the expression of the embodied values that are used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning.

The data from educational practice can be analysed to clarify and communicate the meanings of the embodied expressions of the values of human flourishing that constitute a practice as educational, which is core to reconstructing education. Using this data, as evidence in explanations of educational influences, requires a different form of representation to solely printed text, provided by digital educational technology, to communicate close to practice explanations of educational practice. We have previously published (Whitehead and Huxtable 2006a & b) our analysis of multimedia texts to show how they contribute to the creation of an educational lens to reconstruct education. Our analysis draws on over 50 years of educational enquiry into practitioner-researchers' questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my educational practice as a professional educator and educational researcher?'. The analysis is grounded in over 50 Living Educational Theory doctoral theses that are publicly available from https://www.

actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml. Each thesis has been awarded from universities around the world for the originality of the explanations of educational influence in the learning of the individual researcher, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. The original contribution to knowledge of each thesis is making a contribution to the reconstruction of what counts as educational. As we have said above, we refer to these explanations as living-educational-theories. The validity and rigour of the values and evidence-based explanations is ensured by applying Popper's (1975, 44) idea of the mutual rational controls of critical discussion within the validation groups described above. These focused on strengthening the comprehensibility, evidence, socio-cultural and socio-historical understandings and authenticity of the explanations, in terms of the practitioner-researchers' espoused values being lived as fully as possible. Many evidence and values-based explanations include data from reflective journals.

Because we stress the importance of digital visual data, in clarifying the meanings of the embodied values that are used as explanatory, we are sometimes mistakenly taken to be saying that data can only be analysed using visual means. This is not the case. We draw on analyses that can include insights from the conceptual frameworks and methods of analyses from the disciplines of education, all of which are focused on lexical definitions rather than on ostensive expressions of meaning that are grounded in educational practice.

We are also using the notes from the NEARIMeet of the 29 January 2022 (see http://www.eari.ie/2022/02/08/notes-from-nearimeet-29-january-2022/) to highlight the importance of using an 'educational' lens in reconstructing education. The Winter 2022 NEARIMeet took place online on 29 January 2022. The meeting was chaired by Cornelia Connolly and Máirín Glenn and there were attendees from Australia, USA, China, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, The Netherlands, South Africa, the UK and Ireland, among many others. The theme for the meeting was *Transforming Practices.* The meeting began with a reminder of the ethical expectations (see http://www.eari.ie/neari-network-for-educational-action-research-in-ireland/neari-ethical-statement/) of the NEARIMeet.

We identify with the emphasis of NEARI on the ethical expectations and their importance in transforming practice. Whilst we have benefitted from the early work of Car and Kemmis (1986) we are concerned that there was no mention of what is 'educational' in Kemmis' keynote to the conference. The case we are making is that any analysis of transforming practice that omits a focus on 'What is educational?' is unlikely to lead to an educational reconstruction of education (Whitehead and Huxtable 2022). Whitehead (2022) stresses the importance of 'Critical Reflection in Educational Research' in urging participants in NEARI meetings to research their educational influences in their own and each other's learning with the relationally dynamic values between each other.

We think that it is worth emphasising that perhaps the strongest evidence to support our case, that 'what is educational' matters so much in reconstructing education, can be accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml. These data include the over 50 Living Educational Theory doctorates described above, that have been legitimated in Universities around the world. Each living-educational-theory includes the unique constellation of values used by the practitioner-researcher to explain their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located.

One of these doctorates is by Swaroop Rawal. Rawal is one of the members of the EJOLTs (Educational Journal of Living Theories) Living Educational Theory Research community Rawal's work in India has a focus on 'What is educational?' in her life-skills programme and in contributing to reconstructing education in India:

> University of Worcester Alumna Chosen to Help Write India's New School Curriculum – see https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2022-university-of-worcester-alumna-chosen-to-help-write-indias-new-school-curriculum

> Tuesday, 22 March 2022

> A University of Worcester graduate and Honorary Doctorate recipient has been selected as one of around 100 educators who will re-write the schools' curriculum for India.

> Dr Swaroop Sampat-Rawal was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University in 2018. Swaroop Sampat-Rawal has been appointed to the National Focus Group to write the position papers for the new school curriculum – the first time it has been re-written in more than 35 years.

> 'We have a new education policy just released', said Dr Sampat-Rawal. 'The last time the curriculum was written for India was in 1986. I am honoured to have been selected as one of around 100 educators chosen from the thousands and thousands of educators, academics etc from all over India to work on this.'

> Dr Sampat-Rawal was named among the top 10 best teachers in the world in the Varkey Foundation's annual Global Teacher Prize 2019.

> Dr Sampat-Rawal earned her PhD in Education at Worcester, graduating in 2006. Her doctoral thesis was on the theme of using drama to enhance life skills in children with learning disabilities.

> She has since dedicated herself to community development and advocacy, travelling across India training teachers, while also campaigning to get more children, such as those in tribal communities or street children, into the classroom.

> She recently delivered 75 workshops in 17 States to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Indian independence – an achievement that was recognised with a personal letter from India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.

> 'I was so proud to get a letter from the Prime Minister', she said. 'What an honour to have my work recognised in this way.'

> Dr Sampat-Rawal is aiming to have life skills education included in the new curriculum and wants children to be taught more about India's history and culture before colonisation, through stories of national inspirations, religious unity and cultural interconnection.

Key findings – results and discussion

In explaining why it is important to develop an educational lens in reconstructing education, rather than just using the lenses from the disciplines of education, we have focused on enhancing the professionalism of educators in using a Living Educational Theory approach to continuing professional development. At the heart of this approach is a view of professionalism that includes the responsibility of engaging in educational inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice?' and generating

and sharing their living-educational-theory as a contribution to a global knowledgebase of education with values of human flourishing.

Contributing your living-educational-theory to a knowledgebase of a global community of professional educators is part of the process of amplifying our educational influence in enhancing the flow of values of human flourishing with an educational lens. This educational knowledgebase does not replace the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education. It draws insights from these frameworks and methods in the generation and sharing of living-educational-theories.

As part of this process of generating and sharing living-educational-theories we have been promoting the idea of starting this process using living-posters. You can access the homepage of posters at https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf.

As you make your own contribution to reconstructing education locally and globally, using an educational lens for the benefit of all, we are hopeful that you will share your own living-poster and other writings. Here is the homepage of living-posters with details of how to generate and share your own.

Your poster could help to extend the communities in the Network Educational Action Research Ireland, Special Interest Group of ESAI. at https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/neari21.pdf.

Because of our emphasis on placing what is educational at the heart of reconstructing education, we are hoping that you will join your local educational researching community and others globally, such as the community of Living Educational Theory Researchers, and so amplify the educational influence we can each have in the reconstruction of education with values that carry hope for the flourishing of Humanity. Part of this amplification includes the recognition of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational theory as each professional, educational practitioner, generates their own explanation of educational influence in learning, with values of human flourishing. You could participate in this amplification by submitting your living-educational-theory for publication to the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs). We do urge you to access the Irish researcher, Kennedy's (2022) contribution on 'How my Living Educational Theory Research is helping me to improve my practice as a primary school teacher, in supporting children to recognise and manage their anxiety?'. This contribution serves as a contribution to our response to the question as to Why a focus on 'What is educational?' matters so much in reconstructing education?

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ejolts.net/node/80). Since 1973 his research programme has focused on the creation of the living educational theories that individuals use to improve their practice and explain their educational influences in their workplaces. In 2023 he was awarded a D.Litt. degree from the University of Worcester in the UK. You can access many of his writings from 1967-2023 at: https://www.action-research.net/writings/writing.shtml.

Dr. Marie Huxtable practiced as an Educational Psychologist in English Local Authorities where she developed and implemented policy to improve educational experiences for school children and educators to develop aspirations and the confidence and competences to realise them in their own learning and in other peoples' learning. Her concerns are that: Practice, theory and research appear to lose connection with the purpose of education; Theory and practice develop independently, and without explanation or evaluation related to values of education; Those involved with education appeared to be vying with each other to exert their hegemony over the totalising development of educational theory, practice and provision. In 2012 she was awarded her Ph.D. for her thesis, 'How do I Evolve Living-Educational-Theory Praxis in Living-boundaries?' She is currently a visiting research fellow with the University of Cumbria and continues to support and spread Living Theory research and living-educational-theories in various local and global contexts.

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