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## Delving into Living Educational Theory (LET) research: A conversation with Jack Whitehead

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents an overview of Living Educational Theory (LET) research and its potential to contribute to human flourishing. Through an exploration of key features and examples of this research approach, we demonstrate its unique contribution to the field of education. LET research places the individual at the centre of the research process, encouraging them to reflect on their own practices and develop ways to improve what they are doing in personally meaningful ways. This approach differs from conventional research methodologies that primarily focus on generating and analysing research data. In this article, we draw on insights from the work of Jack Whitehead, a leading LET researcher, to provide a comprehensive overview of the approach. Jack explores the concepts of valid explanation and video recording and their role in capturing and validating actions. Jack also discusses the relationship between LET and research theories and offers insights into how the research approach can contribute to human flourishing. Jack concludes with a discussion of the impact of published articles on others' learning and how research impact can be evaluated. Overall, we provide an informative and valuable resource for researchers, educators, and practitioners seeking to understand and utilise LET research in their own context.

## Introduction

Living Educational Theory (LET) research (Whitehead, 1989) is a unique research approach that differs from conventional research methodologies. Rather than focusing on the analysis of research data, LET places the individual at the heart of its work and encourages them to reflect on their own practices in personally meaningful ways. In this conversational piece, we draw on insights from a conversation with Jack Whitehead, a renowned LET researcher. Through a series of questions, we explore the key features of LET research and its potential to contribute to human flourishing (Whitehead, 2008).

We begin by defining LET research and exploring how it inspired Jack to introduce a different research approach into the field of education. We then describe the concept of a valid explanation and how it can be articulated in layman's terms. We also discuss the role of video recording in capturing and validating actions, and how it can be used to mediate different interpretations of events. Moving on, we explore the relationship between LET and critical theory, and why it is important to encourage everyone to adopt this research approach. We also learn about Jack's project in Africa and the steps involved in producing LET research. In the context of the Malaysian education system, we discuss how the research approach could significantly contribute to society and offer insights into dealing with power dynamics and conflicts of interest in research. Throughout the conversation, we explore the potential of LET research to contribute to human flourishing and discuss how the impact of published articles on the learning of others can be measured and evaluated. Finally, we conclude the conversation with Jack's inspirational words for those considering embarking on LET research.

Overall, this conversation offers a comprehensive overview of LET research and its significance for researchers, educators, and practitioners. Through the insights and experiences

shared by Jack, we gain a deeper understanding of the potential of this research approach to create positive social change and contribute to human flourishing.

### What is Living Educational Theory (LET) research, and how has it inspired you to introduce a different research approach in the field of education?

**Jack Whitehead:** The idea of LET emerged during my years of studying professional development programmes at the University of London Institute of Education<sup>1</sup> from 1968 to 1972. As a science teacher at the time, I pursued my studies part-time, surrounded by renowned philosophers in the field. The prevailing belief was that educational theory encompassed disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and history of education. This was the framework through which I approached educational theory.

However, I encountered a problem. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't generate a valid explanation of my educational influence on my students using the perspectives offered by those disciplines. This led me to leave school teaching after six years and join the University of Bath, where I engaged in teaching in higher education and began researching the possibility of individuals like us, who are practical educators, developing our own valid explanations of educational influence in our own learning, as well as the learning of others and the broader social context. I coined the term LET to describe these explanations.

While I was initially drawn to approaches like narrative inquiry and action research, I found that the methodology of action research didn't necessarily require a valid explanation of one's educational influence. Instead, it excelled in addressing practical problems and improving practice. Consequently, I still employ action reflection cycles as a method. However, LET research goes beyond action research in that it places a responsibility on educators to produce valid explanations of their educational influence

<sup>1</sup>University of London Institute of Education is now known as the UCL Institute of Education since 2 December 2014.

and share them as part of the knowledge base. It seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by empowering educators to articulate their unique educational theories and contribute to the field of education.

### How would you define a valid explanation in layman's terms?

**Jack Whitehead:** In the field of education, we are constantly immersed in what I call a 'values-laden practice' (DeLong & Whitehead, 2023). It became clear to me during my early years of professional development that you cannot separate education from the inherent values it carries. This realisation came to me as I delved into the study of 'ethics and education' and learned from esteemed philosophers. I was convinced, and still am, that anything deemed educational is inherently imbued with values. One notable scholar, Richard Peters, outlined key values such as freedom, justice, consideration of interests, respect, and democratic forms of control and organisation as essential ethical principles to be integrated into educational practices (see Ethics and Education, in Peters, 1966).

The concept of validity is crucial in this context. When I first started exploring this notion, I believed that I was successfully implementing inquiry-based learning in my classroom. However, upon reviewing video footage of my teaching, I discovered that I was inadvertently providing the students with the answers instead of fostering genuine inquiry. This revelation left me feeling like a living contradiction. It pushed me to strive for a valid explanation and prompted me to adjust my practice so that the students could truly engage in inquiry learning. This experience deepened my understanding of validity—I realised that while I may have beliefs and perceptions, I needed to test the validity of those assumptions by engaging in critical discourse with others. It was essential to have my ideas withstand scrutiny and to ensure their alignment with shared understanding. Thus, the notion of validity holds significant importance in educational practice.

### How does a video recording help capture and validate actions?

**Jack Whitehead:** The video serves as a powerful tool for self-reflection, revealing the contradictions within ourselves. It challenges us to confront the realisation that our actions may not align with the values we hold. This is why video is essential—it allows us to witness our own behaviour and brings to light the gap between our beliefs and our actual practices.

As academics, we have been conditioned to believe that our written papers can adequately convey our values and explanations. Many of my papers rely solely on printed text. However, when it comes to expressing the values we hold, the limitations of written words become evident. This is where visual data becomes crucial. In Feyerabend's (1975) book, 'Against Method', he argued that the understanding of values, such as freedom, can only emerge through their practical application. Visual data, therefore, becomes significant in capturing the essence of values and their manifestation in our actions over time.

The visual data helps us go beyond the mere lexical definitions of meaning, where words define other words. It allows us to convey meaning through ostensive expressions—the embodiment and expression of values in our practices. The visual evidence becomes a powerful means of communication, bringing depth and authenticity to our explanations.

In today's digital era, the importance of visual data, particularly digital video, cannot be overstated. It enriches our accounts, enabling us to incorporate the visual evidence of our practices and the values we hold. By embracing visual data, we enhance our understanding, contribute to a more comprehensive knowledge base, and bring greater integrity to our research in education.

### How do values contribute to the establishment of a foundation for human flourishing within different cultures?

**Jack Whitehead:** During my lectures in Malaysia, I was deeply struck by the significant role of religion in shaping values. It became apparent to me that your culture, like many others, draws upon

religious or spiritual commitments as a foundation for its values. For instance, in South Africa, Nelson Mandela incorporated the African spiritual value system known as Ubuntu into the constitution, which places values at its core. Similarly, in Malaysia, I sensed that religious values, stemming from the dominant religious practices, hold great importance, particularly in relation to others.

I hope I am expressing myself clearly. It is common for various cultures to be influenced by religious values, even if they are no longer considered overtly religious or have adopted a secular identity. These values often revolve around care, compassion, and other principles that emerged from religious commitments. In my discussions, I often refer to spiritual values as the foundations of human flourishing. They are the principles that contribute to the well-being and growth of individuals and society as a whole.

In exploring your own culture and society, I believe you will discover a wealth of values that promote human flourishing. These values, deeply rooted in your cultural influences, shape the way you interact with others and strive for collective well-being. By recognising and embracing these values, we can better understand the diverse perspectives and enrich our collective knowledge about fostering human flourishing across different cultural contexts.

### How does living educational theory relate to the critical theory perspective?

**Jack Whitehead:** In the field of action research, one school of thought called ‘Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research’ was developed by Stephen Kemmis and Wilfred Carr in the 1980s (see Carr & Kemmis, 1983). This approach drew upon Habermas’s (1981a, 1981b) theory of communicative action<sup>2</sup>, which

incorporated critical theory at its core. However, in LET research, while insights from these theories and other methodologies can be utilised, they do not dominate the research process. Instead, researchers acknowledge the critical influences of politics, economics, and cultural factors within their own context. By incorporating autoethnography, researchers can bring these cultural influences into their explanations.

LET research necessitates a critical evaluation of one’s explanations in relation to the held values. These values serve as the critical standards by which improvements in practice are judged. Moreover, these values play a crucial role in testing the validity of the researcher’s contribution to knowledge. In this way, the researcher continuously evaluates their practice, ensuring that it aligns with their values and contributes to the advancement of knowledge.

The combination of critical awareness, cultural influences, and values-based evaluation distinguishes LET research from other approaches. By integrating these elements, researchers are empowered to critically reflect on their practice, consider the broader social, political, and economic contexts, and ultimately make meaningful contributions to the field of education.

### Why does everyone need to be encouraged to undertake LET research?

**Jack Whitehead:** The reason I would encourage everybody, for example in Malaysia, to undertake LET research is because the values that I refer to as the values of human flourishing will be distinct to the Malaysian culture. It’s similar in Africa where I am currently collaborating with three universities and their staff. We are exploring Ubuntu<sup>3</sup>, which pertains to the values foundation and way of being

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<sup>2</sup>The theory of communicative action is primarily explored in Jürgen Habermas’s two-volume book ‘The Theory of Communicative Action’, published in 1981. He argues that social action, and by extension society itself, is heavily mediated by communication and language. He distinguishes between two main types of action: instrumental action (where the actor does not take into account the perspectives of others and is focused only on achieving a particular goal), and communicative action (where the

actors are trying to reach a mutual understanding and coordinate their actions through rational dialogue).

<sup>3</sup>Ubuntu is a concept that originated in Africa, particularly in the southern regions, which encompasses various philosophical and ethical principles. It is often associated with the Bantu languages and cultures, but its core ideas resonate beyond specific ethnic boundaries.

in what they term community-based educational research (see Whitehead & Huxtable, 2022).

In Malaysia, it is possible to concentrate on the values of the individuals you work with. You can inquire about how they enhance their practice and contribute to our society. This is why I firmly believe that everyone should be encouraged to pursue LET research. It provides them with an opportunity to demonstrate how they contribute to the improvement of learning through the values of human flourishing. So, the well-being and care for the actual values of each person you collaborate with, each individual possesses a unique set of values. They can make their own distinct contribution by showcasing how they wholeheartedly live their values within the context of their work. Therefore, I advocate for everyone to undertake LET research.

### Can you provide more details about your project in Africa?

**Jack Whitehead:** In South Africa, universities have a commendable practice of allowing their staff to dedicate approximately 10% of their time to community engagement projects. This year (2022), I was appointed as an extraordinary professor in community-based educational research at Northwest University for a three-year period.

Let me provide you with an example of a specific project taking place at one of the universities. They have identified an issue called ‘period poverty’ within their society. Many women in the community face challenges due to the stigma associated with menstruation, which results in a need for support to overcome this form of poverty. The staff at the university, in collaboration with the community, are actively working on addressing this issue. Their goal is to empower and liberate women, making it a central concern within their communities. This example exemplifies how community engagement can be harnessed to tackle important social issues.

In the context of Malaysia, you could explore your society and identify areas where higher education can make a meaningful contribution. By working collaboratively with the community, you can engage in community-based projects to address those issues. This collaborative approach, known as

community engagement, allows for a holistic understanding of societal needs and provides an opportunity to actively contribute to their resolution.

By examining the local context and working together with the community, you can create projects that are aligned with the values and aspirations of the Malaysian society. This approach not only benefits the community but also enriches the educational experience and enhances the impact of higher education institutions.

### What are the steps to produce LET research?

**Jack Whitehead:** When we talk about ‘producing’ in the context of LET research, it goes beyond traditional notions of written text. As I mentioned earlier, this form of research often incorporates digital visual data to enhance communication and understanding. It expands the scope of writing to include more than just lexical definitions.

In many of the papers I have produced, you will find video clips and other forms of visual data that are used to convey the meanings of embodied values such as care, compassion, freedom, justice, and democratic forms of control. These values reveal themselves over time in practice, and through the integration of visual data, we can demonstrate their presence and influence.

When we talk about writing, it is crucial to recognise that it encompasses the inclusion of digital visual data as evidence to support claims about educational influence. While most academic texts primarily rely on printed text, I emphasise the importance of integrating visual data into the writing to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research.

Even as I am currently working on a book, I acknowledge the challenges of incorporating visual data into the text. However, it is a practice that I insist on, as evidenced by many of the papers available on my website in the Jack Whitehead’s writing section (at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>). Over the past five years, a significant number of these papers have utilised digital visual data as evidence to support claims about educational influence and learning.

This emphasis on incorporating visual data is essential because it allows for a more nuanced and holistic representation of the research findings. It enables researchers to showcase the practical manifestations of their educational theories and provides a richer understanding for both researchers and readers.

### Does LET research align with the definition of research as a systematic inquiry?

**Jack Whitehead:** Stenhouse (1975), when he formulated his definition of research, stated that research is a systematic inquiry that is made public. The act of making research findings public is crucial because it allows for tests of validity to be applied to the explanations provided. This emphasis on systematic inquiry is also evident in LET research.

LET research is systematic in nature because it incorporates not only narratives but also the action reflection cycles. It follows a systematic process where individuals identify a problem when their values are not being fully realised, imagine potential solutions, take action, gather data during the process to evaluate their influence, and subsequently modify their actions based on the evaluations. This approach draws inspiration from Dewey's (1903) pragmatic philosophy and Lewin's (1946) reflection cycle, thus embodying a systematic form of inquiry.

At the heart of LET research is the desire to improve practice. This drive for improvement arises from the experience of a living contradiction, where individuals recognise a discrepancy between their values and their actual practice. When faced with such a contradiction, the process of imagination is triggered, leading individuals to develop an action plan to enhance their practice. As they implement these actions, they are mindful of collecting relevant data to assess the effectiveness of their efforts in fully living their values. Evaluation becomes a crucial step, wherein

individuals reflect on their influence and produce explanations to articulate their learning and growth.

In the pursuit of validity, LET research incorporates validation groups into the process. These groups typically consist of three to eight individuals who subject the researcher's explanations to rigorous questioning. The purpose of these validations is to enhance the comprehensibility of the explanation, strengthen the evidence supporting the claims, deepen the socio-cultural understanding, and enhance the authenticity of the explanation, demonstrating the researcher's commitment to living their values as fully as possible.

By incorporating this systematic and rigorous approach, LET research strives to produce meaningful and valid explanations that contribute to both personal growth and the advancement of educational practices.

### What are some ways to mediate different interpretations of events captured in a video recording?

**Jack Whitehead:** When addressing different interpretations of events captured in a video recording, it is essential to consider methods for mediating these divergent views. If a video is presented without any additional context, it can elicit various interpretations from different viewers. However, by integrating the visual data with an accompanying explanation, it becomes possible to subject it to a validation group.

A notable illustration of this approach can be found in a PhD thesis by Naidoo (2005), which is available on my website<sup>4</sup>. Naidoo's research focused on individuals affected by Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Through a video documenting the interactions between a husband and his wife, with the wife suffering from dementia, Naidoo was able to provide compelling evidence to convince examiners of her interpretation regarding the significance of compassion. The video served as concrete support for her claim and showcased how

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<sup>4</sup>Marian Naidoo's PhD thesis offers a narrative self-study that explores the transformative power of creative and critical engagement in improving interpersonal relationships and

communication within a multi-professional and multi-agency healthcare setting. Read more at <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/naidoo.shtml>

her narrative aligned with the evidence, demonstrating the potential for validating interpretations through visual data.

The key point to consider, as you rightly raised, is the necessity of connecting the digital visual data to an explanation. By doing so, researchers can employ the data as evidence to substantiate claims related to the meaning of their values, which are used as guiding principles in their research. It is through this connection between visual data and explanation that the data gains significance beyond being mere information. It transforms into a tool for validating interpretations and providing a robust foundation for understanding the captured events.

To mediate different interpretations of events depicted in a video recording, it is crucial to integrate the visual data with a comprehensive explanation. This enables the data to undergo scrutiny and validation by a group of individuals, strengthening the validity and reliability of the interpretations. By establishing a clear connection between the digital visual data and the explanatory framework, researchers can effectively justify their claims and offer a deeper understanding of the events captured in the video.

### **In the context of the Malaysian education system, how do you think the research approach could significantly contribute to society?**

**Jack Whitehead:** I appreciate and acknowledge the extensive knowledge you both possess regarding the cultural context of the Malaysian education system, including the current policies pursued by the government. My suggestion, of adopting a LET research approach, stems from its potential value in enhancing the professional development of teachers in your country. By implementing this approach as a policy, specifically a LET approach, we can have a positive impact on the growth and development of educators. This

approach aligns with the values of human flourishing that are inherent within the Malaysian context and contributes to the betterment of society as a whole.

Encouraging teachers to embrace this approach means they actively contribute to the cultural fabric of Malaysia by integrating the values of human flourishing into their teaching practices. It acknowledges that each teacher brings their unique set of values into their professional development, shaping their educational influence. It is therefore crucial to establish a clear policy framework for the professional development of teachers in Malaysia, ensuring they have the necessary support and resources to incorporate this approach effectively.

I have previously undertaken a similar endeavour for the UK, outlining the arguments for this approach in a paper published in 2016 (see Huxtable & Whitehead, 2016), which also can be found in the Jack Whitehead's writing section of my website<sup>5</sup>. I believe that both of you can further develop and justify this approach as a comprehensive policy for the professional development of all teachers in Malaysia. By doing so, we can foster continuous improvement in their teaching practice and contribute to the broader professional knowledge base of educators in the country.

Together, we can create a transformative learning environment that empowers teachers, promotes human flourishing, and ultimately enhances the quality of education in Malaysia.

### **How can someone deal with power dynamics and conflicts of interest when they have to follow the political interests of more powerful individuals or institutions?**

**Jack Whitehead:** The challenges and obstacles associated with promoting LET research have been a consistent part of my journey. Over the years, I have encountered opposition and even faced

<sup>5</sup> Huxtable and Whitehead's (2016) chapter explores how they enacted a self-study methodology as Living Theory researchers, which was guided by their ontological and social values. They sought to demonstrate their contribution to the evolution of educational knowledge, showcase their own professional

development, and improve their impact on the professional development of educational practitioners. Read more at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/mhjw2016enacting.pdf>

attempts to reject my work, as reflected in my 1993 book where I documented such experiences. These difficulties are rooted in the politics of ‘knowledge and power’, echoing the insights of Michel Foucault<sup>6</sup>. When one strives to advance the values of human flourishing, it often leads to confronting contradictions and resistance from those who may be unwilling to address them.

Despite these challenges, there is an opportunity to publish and disseminate our ideas in academic circles. One of our current strengths lies in the freedom to share our beliefs and research internationally through respected journals. In the context of Malaysia, you have the potential to transcend national boundaries and contribute to the international discourse on professional development through LET research. By outlining how academics can support and engage with this approach, you can advocate for a transformative form of professional development that aligns with the values of human flourishing.

However, it is essential to recognise that cultural and political factors may pose significant hurdles along the way. Power relations can be formidable, and they sometimes exert influence to suppress dissenting voices. Caution is advised to navigate these issues and avoid potential consequences that could arise from challenging the status quo. Despite the difficulties, it is through the collective efforts of individuals committed to this approach that progress can be made. Together, we can build a supportive community of researchers and practitioners who are dedicated to transforming education and empowering learners in Malaysia and beyond.

## How can the research approach contribute to human flourishing?

**Jack Whitehead:** In the field of education, I believe that everyone possesses a unique constellation of values that revolve around human flourishing. Concepts such as freedom, justice, democracy, consideration of interest, and even cultural values like ‘Ubuntu’ or ‘Aloha’<sup>7</sup> in Hawaii, encompass these values of human flourishing. It is important for both of you to identify and articulate your unique values, and through research processes, navigate any political difficulties that may arise to ensure your voices are not silenced but rather connected with international groups. By contributing your perspectives to the global knowledge base, you can actively promote and advance the values of human flourishing.

I hold great respect for your commitment to care and well-being in education. By sharing your narratives and experiences, you have already begun to contribute to human flourishing. Being in higher education allows you to connect with educators globally who are also dedicated to sharing their values within their own cultures. Through collaborative and cooperative efforts, you can research your educational influences on your own learning and the learning of others, further strengthening your impact. This approach can be incredibly powerful and impactful in promoting human flourishing.

Over the past three years, I have been fortunate to participate in 2021<sup>8</sup>, 2022<sup>9</sup> and 2023<sup>10</sup> symposia at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conferences, collaborating with researchers from Nepal, India, Canada, the

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<sup>6</sup>Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a prominent French philosopher, social theorist, and historian of ideas. His ideas and theories revolve around the relationship between power, knowledge, and social institutions. He challenged conventional understandings of power by arguing that power is not solely a repressive force but also operates through discourses, social practices, and institutional structures. He explored how power operates in different historical contexts, focusing on the ways it shapes and regulates individuals and social groups.

<sup>7</sup>Aloha is a term that holds cultural and spiritual significance in the Hawaiian language and is commonly associated with the Hawaiian Islands. Aloha also encompasses values such as hospitality, kindness, and warmth in interactions with others. It reflects a way of life that promotes a sense of community, empathy, and the

importance of maintaining positive relationships. The concept of aloha extends beyond language and serves as a guiding principle for how individuals can approach life with an open heart and a spirit of goodwill.

<sup>8</sup>Read more at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Read more at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/AERA2022sessionprop.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>Read more at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera2023/aera2023overviewproposal220722.pdf>



USA, and the UK. These interactions and exchanges help to fortify our efforts and contribute to the work we are doing. I encourage you to share any drafts or ideas you have, as this collaborative sharing will amplify the research approach's contribution to human flourishing. I extend this invitation to anyone else who is reading this, as I believe that together, we can make a significant difference.

### How do you measure the impact of published articles on the learning of others, and evaluate research impact?

**Jack Whitehead:** There are numerous examples from around the world where individuals have embraced LET and incorporated it into their research and practice. Over the past four decades, this movement has grown, and I have been conducting workshops in various countries, including Canada, America, and Australia. By sharing your papers with me from Malaysia, I can ensure that people in these places, as well as others influenced by my work, have access to your work. This will enable them to learn from and be influenced by your contributions. The video component can also play a significant role in showcasing the cooperation between researchers and further inspiring others.

When I talk about influence, I mean the impact that individuals can have on one another's work. For instance, I recently had a Skype conversation with someone from a Middle Eastern country who expressed interest in developing an action research approach based on my papers. They sought my guidance and advice on improving their practice. This kind of exchange is happening worldwide. I can show you over 50 living theory documents on my website at <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>, that demonstrate how people have been influenced by these ideas. They have developed their own original contributions to knowledge and

made them public. Others are explicitly accessing, referencing, and incorporating these contributions into their own work. By sharing your conversation and connecting you with the groups I work with regularly, we can amplify the influence and impact of your ideas, values, and the work you are doing in Malaysia.

### What final inspirational words would you offer to those who are considering embarking on LET research?

**Jack Whitehead:** There is a significant issue of gender inequality that persists across different cultures. Women, in particular, have historically been discouraged from expressing their voices and asserting their value. In countries like China, women often refer to the 'poppy syndrome'<sup>11</sup>, where they feel unable to stand out due to the fear of being put down. This sentiment is not limited to one region but can be observed worldwide.

It is disheartening to see that, in many instances, men have played a role in perpetuating the notion that a woman's voice holds lesser worth. However, it is within our power to challenge and overcome this mindset. By actively valuing and promoting women's voices alongside men's, we can collectively work towards breaking down these barriers.

In my own work, I have made a conscious effort to ensure gender balance in my supervisions and research, acknowledging the equal value of women's contributions. In the LET research doctorates at <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>, you will find an equal representation of women and men, demonstrating the importance of their voices and perspectives.

We must remain aware of the cultural contexts in which we operate. For instance, looking at the current situation in Afghanistan, where women who were making remarkable contributions to education and society now face

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<sup>11</sup>The term 'poppy syndrome' is a metaphorical expression that is used to describe a phenomenon where individuals are discouraged or prevented from standing out or achieving success due to the fear of criticism, envy, or backlash from others. It is

commonly associated with societies or cultures where there is a tendency to undermine or put down those who excel or display exceptional abilities.

severe challenges under Taliban rule.<sup>12</sup> This highlights the urgency of recognising and supporting women's voices.

It is essential for us to embrace and embody the values you hold. Your confidence in your worth and the significance of your voices will empower you to share your insights and understandings with one another and the wider community. Together, you can foster an environment where mutual respect and support thrive, making a meaningful impact on gender equality and cultural transformation. Your collaboration will be significant and influential in creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

## Conclusion

This conversation with Jack Whitehead provides a profound exploration of LET research. It is clear that this research approach is not just about generating and analysing data, but about the individual's journey of self-improvement and contribution to human flourishing. The emphasis on the individual's role in their own learning and the learning of others is a powerful reminder of the potential of education to effect change.

In the context of the Malaysian education system, the impact of LET research could be substantial. For one, the approach fits well with Malaysia's current trend towards improving its education system by focusing on personalisation and individual growth. The emphasis on self-improvement and self-reflection within LET could facilitate this shift, particularly in the context of teacher development. Malaysia's education system has historically been exam-oriented, with an emphasis on rote learning. The implementation of LET can serve as a counterpoint to this, offering a more holistic, student-centred approach that values the individual's learning journey. The use of video

recording as a tool for self-reflection could be particularly impactful in this regard, allowing educators to more effectively examine and improve their practices.

The concept of 'living contradiction' might be especially powerful in the Malaysian context, where a gap often exists between the intended outcomes of the education policy and the realities of classroom practices. Acknowledging these contradictions and striving to align values and practices can pave the way for more effective teaching and learning experiences. Furthermore, Malaysia's diverse cultural context makes the 'living theory' approach even more pertinent. With a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual population, the opportunity for educators to develop their own living theories based on their unique experiences and backgrounds is crucial. These individualised theories can help address the diverse learning needs of students, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

However, it is important to note that for the potential benefits of LET research to be fully realised in the Malaysian context, systemic changes may be required. This includes fostering an open culture of self-reflection and professional development among educators, and modifying assessment systems to move away from purely exam-oriented evaluations. It also means addressing potential resistance to change and ensuring that educators have the necessary support and resources to engage in this process. As such, policymakers, education leaders, and practitioners would need to work collaboratively to ensure that the principles of LET research are integrated effectively into the system. By doing so, they can contribute to the development of a more reflective, inclusive, and learner-centred education system in Malaysia.

In conclusion, LET offers a unique and powerful approach to educational research. It

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<sup>12</sup>Over the last two decades, before the return of the Taliban in August 2021, many Afghan women had made significant progress in various fields, including education, politics, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. This was particularly the case in the country's urban centres, where opportunities for women's education and employment had significantly increased compared to the previous

Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001. However, since the Taliban re-established control over Afghanistan in August 2021, women's rights and freedoms have been severely curtailed. The group's strict interpretation of Islamic law traditionally restricts women's roles in society, limiting their access to education, employment, and public life.

places the individual at the centre of the research process, encouraging them to reflect on their practices and take action to improve. The conversation with Jack Whitehead provides valuable insights into this approach and its potential to contribute to human flourishing. It serves as a reminder of the transformative power of education and the role that individuals can play in bringing about change.

## About Jack Whitehead

Professor Jack Whitehead, currently serving as a Visiting Professor at the University of Cumbria, and an Extraordinary Professor in Community-based Educational Research at the North-West University in South Africa, is a renowned figure in the realm of education and research. His illustrious career began when he worked as a Science Teacher in London Comprehensive Schools between 1967 and 1973, which transitioned into a long-standing academic tenure at the University of Bath. He held the position of Lecturer in Education for 36 years, from 1973 to 2009. Following this, he took up the mantle as an Adjunct Professor at Liverpool Hope University before his current role at the University of Cumbria and North West University.

As a testament to his expertise and leadership, he held the prestigious position of President of the British Educational Research Association from 1988 to 1989. Furthermore, he was appointed as a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at Westminster College, Utah, United States. His influence in the field of education extends beyond the United Kingdom. He has imparted his knowledge as a Visiting Professor at Brock University in Ontario, Guyuan Teachers' College, and Ningxia Teachers' University in China. He also was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Bath from 2009 to 2012. He was awarded an honorary D.Litt degree from the University of Worcester in 2023.

Whitehead's research since 1973 has centred around the creation of the Living Educational Theory (LET) that individuals utilise to enhance their practice and elucidate their educational influences within their respective workplaces. A


key aspect of his research revolves around inquiries such as "How do I improve what I am doing?". His more recent investigations have concentrated on utilising digitalised video data to explain educational influences in continuing professional development across diverse workplaces.

Beyond his academic and professional commitments, Whitehead's contributions to literature in his field are noteworthy. His recent publications underscore his unwavering dedication to research and education. This includes his work in the Action Learning Action Research Journal, the Wiley Handbook of Action Research in Education, and numerous books on action research and self-study. In addition, Whitehead has conducted numerous workshops around the globe on action research, living theory research, coaching, mentoring, and professional development.

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