

## **Changing Lives through Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry**

In this symposium, five international practitioner-researchers share their research: Jack Whitehead, UK, Tara Ratnam, India, Parbati Dhungana, Nepal, Michelle Vaughan, USA, Jacqueline DeLong, Canada. We share our learning as a culture of inquiry where we co-create knowledge and as individuals in our contexts. The following conference sub-themes will be addressed: Community action and activism; Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; Improving practice in the face of adversity & pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; Social Justice and equity; Educational and educative change; Methodological rigour and innovation. Evidence will be shared to justify the claim that Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research are changing lives with values of human flourishing within living cultures of inquiry. "What is the more general value of this initiative? Our work gets its validity from how the meaning we produce resonates with others working in other contexts with similar concerns-- contributing to the larger dialogue on educational issues of equity, change, knowledge co-construction and conducting research"

Jack Whitehead, University of Cumbria, UK.

## **Contributing to Changing Lives through Action and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry**

CARN was formed in 1976 as the Classroom Action Research Network. This was the year that I first explicated my use of action reflection cycles in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice?' in

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

The report begins with statements from teachers in mixed ability science lessons, of their problems and possible solutions. These problems included the improvement of relations between teachers and pupils and the organisation of resources for enquiry learning. In response to these problems, the network of in-service support, described in section 4, was created. This network involved a Resource Collection and Evaluation Service from Bath University and financial assistance from Wiltshire L.E.A. and The Schools Council. A central focus in the report is the process of self-evaluation, by the teachers, of the relationship between what they intended to do and what they achieved in practice. The teachers were assisted, in this process of evaluation, by video tapes of their classroom practice and interview data on their own intentions and their pupils' responses. This information was provided by the Science Centre of Bath University. You will see that improvements in learning occurred through the creative and critical powers of individual teachers and a high degree of cooperative activity. If you feel that it may be helpful to share your problems with the individual teachers, their names and location are given on the back cover. Do please contact them.

Some 46 years later, in 2022 I am still a member of CARN (Now the Collaborative Action Research Network) who is continuing to research the implications of asking, researching and answering a question about improving my professional practice. In making my contribution to the symposium my question 'How do I improve my professional practice in higher education with values of human flourishing?' may appear similar to my initial question of 1976. It is however very different as it focuses on sharing insights from a broad range of researchers and practitioners into how action research and Living Educational Theory Research can contribute to the greater good. The 'I' in the question, whilst still recognising myself as a living contradiction as I seek to live my values of human flourishing as fully as possible, is a relationally dynamic 'I' that is explicitly grounded in and influenced by my sociohistorical and sociocultural context. My values of human flourishing include global citizenship with an engagement with cultures of inquiry.

As I share my present research in 2022 in CARN I recognise that it has emerged from some 55 years of professional engagement with education which began with my concern and question in the first science lesson I taught in 1967 at Langdon Park School in London's East End, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. I have documented my educational research into my professional practice and learning over the 55 years in an archive of my writings from 1967-2022 at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>). This is not to say that my present research is determined by my past research, only that my present research is influenced by my past research, in ways that I acknowledge below as I share insights from my past research that continues to influence my present inquiry.

In my present inquiry I am building on my collaboration with other contributors to the symposium. For example, I continue to draw on DeLong's idea of a culture of inquiry in extending my meaning of collaboration into community-based educational research. I also use Ratnam's idea that the meanings we produce resonate with others, working in other contexts with similar concerns in contributing to the larger dialogue on educational issues of equity, change, knowledge co-construction and conducting research. Evidence of my use of these meanings of a culture of inquiry and collaboration can be seen in my contributions to AERA 2021 and 2022 symposia at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf> with a focus on educational responsibility and <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/AERA2022sessionprop.pdf> with a focus on equity.

I shall focus on my meanings of community-based educational research in this contribution to CARN 2022, as I engage with the professional development of staff in Higher Education from my new position as Extraordinary Professor in Community-Based Educational Research, at North-West University in South Africa.

I shall also draw insights from my recent writings to show how I am addressing the following conference sub-themes of CARN 2022.

- i) Community action and activism;

Whitehead, J. (2020) Contributing to moving action research to activism with Living Theory research. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 20(3) 55-73.  
<https://journals.nipissingu.ca/index.php/cjar/article/view/467>

This paper follows the organisation of the successful proposal: 1) The research and action aims; 2) methodology, theoretical tools and methods; 3) results, outputs, program changes and events. The research aims are focused on the communication of meanings of relationally dynamic values in educational conversations in the generation of living-theories by activist scholars that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. The action aims are focused on establishing a global educational conversation with a focus on improving practice with these values. The methodology, theoretical tools and methods are focused on the generation of their living-theories. The results, outputs, program changes and events demonstrate the spreading global educational influences of Living Theory research.

Whitehead, J. & Huxtable, M. (2022) Developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Community Based Educational Research. Accepted for publication in the journal *Educational Research for Social Change*.

What educational-practitioners have in common is the intention of contributing to the learning of communities, and those who comprise them, to live values of human flourishing and to help other people, communities and Humanity learning to do so too. Professional educational-practitioner researchers can contribute to communities creating positive futures locally and globally by making public valid values-laden explanations of educational influence in learning. Whitehead coined the term 'living-educational-theory' for such explanations. The implications of educational-practitioners accepting professional responsibility for realising their humane values as fully as possible in practice, and contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase by developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Community Based Educational Research, are explored. These included individuals and communities identifying where they experience their educational-practitioner self as a living-contradiction and/or their values negated and creating constructive ways forward; testing the validity of claims to be improving educational practice which enhances educational, values-laden, influences in learning; strengthening accounts of learning to make positive social change in this complex and interconnected world through a process of social validation. Illustrative examples are given, and limitations, challenges and next steps identified. (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2022)

- ii) Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation;

Creating And Contributing To An Ecology Of Knowledges

<https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>

- iii) Improving practice in the face of adversity & pandemics;

### **In the face of adversity**

Whitehead, J. (1993) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge. Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. Originally published by Hyde publications in 1993. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jwgek93.htm>

## **PART 1 THE GROWTH OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING**

## ABOUT POWER

- 1) 1977 *Improving learning in Schools - an in-service problem*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/1ins77.pdf>
- 2) **1976 Living contradictions - I am a University Academic. I am not.**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/2ten.pdf>
- 3) 1980 *In-service Education, The Knowledge-Base of Education*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/3ins80.pdf>
- 4) **1980 Living contradictions - I am a creative academic. I am not a creative academic. I can question the judgements of examiners. I cannot question .**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/4PhD.pdf>
- 5) 1985 *An analysis of an individual's educational development - the basis for personally orientated action research.*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/5anal.pdf>
- 6) **1987 Living contradictions - My writings are consistent with my duties as a University Academic . No they are not.**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/6disc.pdf>
- 7) 1989 *Creating living educational theories from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/7livth.pdf>
- 8) 1990 *How do I improve my Professional Practice as an Academic and Educational Manager? A dialectical analysis of an individual's educational development and a basis for socially orientated action research*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/8wc90.pdf>
- 9) **1991 The actions of a Senate Working Party on a Matter of Academic Freedom.**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/9senwp.pdf>
- 10) 1992 *Paper - How can my philosophy of action research transform and improve my professional practice and produce a good social order? A response to Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt* <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/10wc92.pdf>

### In the face of a pandemic

Sections iv) and v) below contain the evidence and values-based explanations of the educational influences in learning of practitioner-researchers working within contexts affected by the Co-vid 19 pandemic.

- iv) Including diverse voices and perspectives;

Delong, J., Whitehead, J., Mishra, S. & Vaughan, M. (2021). Symposium presented at the 2021 Conference of the American Educational Research Association on Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in

global contexts. Accessed from

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf>

The contributors are all exploring the implications for improving their educational practices and contributing to educational knowledge of accepting educational responsibility in building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in their local and global contexts. They are participating in a global social movement of educational researchers this is engaged in asking, researching and answering, 'How do I, individually and in cooperation with others, enhance the difference Living Educational Theory research can make in a community concerned with extending human flourishing?' Each researcher is moved by unique constellations of values that are used to explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence their practices and understandings.

v) Social Justice and Equity;

Delong, J., Whitehead, J., Dhungana, P., Vaughan, M. & Rawal, S. (2022) Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century in global contexts through Living Educational Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry. Symposium at the April 2022 Conference of the American Educational Research Association on Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century, in San Diego, California. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/AERA2022sessionprop.pdf>

The contributors are all exploring the implications for improving their educational practices and contributing to educational knowledge on Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry. They are participating in a global social movement of educational researchers engaged in asking, researching and answering, 'How do I, in our Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry, enhance the influence of Living Educational Theory research on cultivating equitable education systems for the 21st Century?'

Each researcher is moved by unique constellations of values that are used to explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence their practices and understandings.

vi) Educational and educative change;

Whitehead, J. (1999) Educative Relations in a New Era. Paper published in *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, Vol. 7, No.1, pp. 73-90, 1999. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/CS4.htm>

The aim of this paper is to present a form of curriculum theorising which is grounded in the living educative relations, theories, practices and disciplined enquiries of a professional educator. It shows how the living curricular theories of professional educators constitute a discipline of education.

What I want to do in this paper is to offer a form of curriculum theorising which is grounded in what I have called living educational theories (Whitehead, 1989). The particular form of curriculum theorising I have in mind has emerged from a synthesis

of two traditions which have often been viewed as incommensurable. I am thinking of the two thousand year old conflict between the propositional and dialectical traditions. These conflicts are represented in differences between Plato and Aristotle, and Popper and Marcuse. Plato, in the 'Phaedrus', through the words of Socrates, writes of the art of the dialectician involving holding together both the One and the Many. By this he meant our capacities to synthesise and analyse; to hold together under a general idea and to break things down into their separate particulars. Aristotle in his work 'On Interpretation' writes of the necessity of eliminating contradictions by choosing whether a person has a characteristic or not. Plato appears to embrace contradictions. Aristotle explicitly eliminates contradictions from correct thought.

Over 2000 years later, in the 1960s, these conflicts could be seen clearly between Popper's (1963) and Marcuse's (1964) views of knowledge. Popper believed that dialectical theories were based on nothing better than a loose and woolly way of speaking. Using the laws of inference he demonstrated that theories which contained contradiction were entirely useless. Marcuse, on the other hand, claimed that propositional theories, by eliminating contradictions, were masking the dialectical nature of reality.

I think the above writing is characteristic of many educational researchers and curriculum theorists. The linguistic form of my communication is propositional. I am making claims about the writings of several others, which can be tested for validity. I think I have avoided contradictions in the sense that my sentences do not contain mutually exclusive statements which I claim are true simultaneously.

Whitehead, J. & Huxtable, M. (2021) A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Educational, Professional Development. KWARTALNIK PEDAGOGICZNY 2021 NUMER 4(264), 163-185.

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmhletrprofdev2021.pdf>

An argument for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development is presented. A living-educational-theory (a term coined by Whitehead by 1989) is the valid, values-laden and evidence-based explanation of the practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. An educational-practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research methodology as they research into their practice to understand and improve it and to generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theory. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. Examples are given of the difference adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach has made to improve educational and professional practice. The difference is focused on realising professional educational responsibilities to contribute to the knowledgebase of education and a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity. The difference is also grounded in practitioners accepting their educational responsibilities for living their values as fully as possible and for sharing the knowledge they are creating. Examples drawn from India, England, South Africa, Pakistan and Bangladesh serve to emphasise the global influence of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing, educational professional development.

- vii) Methodological rigour and innovation.

Whitehead, J. (2008) Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 1(1) 103-126. Retrieved from <https://ejolts.net/node/80>

The approach outlined below is focused on a living theory methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge from questions of the kind ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ It also includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge. The new epistemology rests on a living logic of educational enquiry and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that include flows of life affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of humanity.

The presentation emphasizes the importance of the uniqueness of each individual’s living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) in improving practice and generating knowledge. It emphasizes the importance of individual creativity in contributing to improving practice and knowledge from within historical and cultural opportunities and constraints in the social contexts of the individual’s life and work.

The web-based version of this presentation demonstrates the importance of local, national and international communicative collaborations for improving practice and generating knowledge in the context of globalizing communications. Through its multi-media representations of educational relationships and explanations of educational influence in learning it seeks to communicate new living standards of judgment. These standards are relationally-dynamic and grounded in both improving practice and generating knowledge. They express the life-affirming energy of individuals, cultures and the cosmos, with values and understandings that it is claimed carry hope for the future of humanity.

- viii) Sharing evidence to justify the claim that Action and Living Educational Theory Research are changing lives with values of human flourishing within living cultures of inquiry.

In moving my inquiry into the present with intentions to contribute to the creation of a future with values of human flourishing I am grounding my present inquiry within the relational dynamics of collaboration and community. For example, I am collaborating with the following individuals in this symposium. Clockwise from the top left are Jacqueline Delong, Jack Whitehead, Michelle Vaughan, Parbati Dungana and Tara Ratnam.



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



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

In the centre of this homepage of living-posters are guidelines on how to develop and share your own living-posters. I do hope that you will help to extend and deepen the above



collaborations, on changing lives through action research and living educational theory research in cultures of inquiry.

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

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

I'm sometimes startled and fascinated by the originality of other people as I experience them expressing their meanings in ways I haven't thought of. After some confusion, as I seek to understand these unfamiliar meanings, I begin to understand myself and the world in which I live, in new ways. As the originality of mind of others influences my own, I integrate new insights into my understandings. The public sharing of these new insights, in Monday evening conversations in the Department of Education of the University of Bath, helps me to clarify my insights, test their validity through the public exercise of critical judgement and hence include them in the growth of my educational knowledge.

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

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

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

*and I'm raising a child by the man that killed him."* (Eden Charles, video-taped conversation, 31 Oct. 2003)

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

In sharing such evidence to justify the claim that Action and Living Educational Theory Research are changing lives with values of human flourishing within living cultures of inquiry, I am using the terms educational influences in learning and culture as follows:

### **Conceptualising Culture**

In my meaning of culture I use the second sense below where Said writes that it includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.

As I use the word, 'culture' means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history.....

Second, and almost imperceptible, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. As Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s.... In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. (Said, pp. xii-xiv, 1993)

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

### **The significance of influence**

In focusing on ‘influence’ in educational influence in learning I agree with the following:

*No word comes easier or oftener to the critic’s pen than the word influence, and no vaguer notion can be found among all the vague notions that compose the phantom armory of aesthetics. Yet there is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another.* (Said, 1997, p. 15)

Said, E. W. (1997) *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. p. 15. London ; Granta.

I use influence rather than ‘impact’ because of the direct linear causation suggested by the word ‘impact’. For me, an educational influence emphasises the necessity of a learner’s response to what is being done to them in defining an educational influence. An educational influence always requires a conscious response from the learner. An educational influence is never a direct causal influence of the kind, ‘if I do this then that is learnt’. Hence my emphasis on educational influence in learning.

My reason for emphasising the importance of using digital visual data in explanations of educational influence in cultures of inquiry is because of a limitation in purely printed text-based explanations. Along with Huxtable we presented the evidence of this limitation at the 7<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association in two papers. The first is our multi-media text. The second is our purely printed-text to meet the conference requirements for publication in the conference proceedings. The purely printed-text is limited in the communication of the expression of embodied meanings that can be more adequately communicated with evidence from digital visual data:

Whitehead, J. & Huxtable, M. (2006) How are we co-creating living standards of judgement in action-researching our professional practices? Multi-media text presented at the World Congress of ALARPM and PAR 21-24 August 2006 in Groningen. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmh06ALARPMmulti.pdf>

Whitehead, J. & Huxtable, M. (2006) How are we co-creating living standards of judgement in action-researching our professional practices? Printed text in the Conference Proceedings of the World Congress of ALARPM and PAR 21-24 August 2006 in Groningen. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmhalarpmttext06.pdf>