

Researching Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: World Leading Educational Research at Edge Hill University

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Abstract

This presentation is focused on enhancing the professionalism of staff in Higher Education through researching one's own practice in questions of the kind 'How do I improve my educational influences in learning in my professional practice in Higher Education?' It is based on a view of professionalism that includes our educational responsibility as educators in Higher Education to research such questions and to contribute the educational knowledge we generate. The contributions are explanations of our educational influence in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which our practice is located, to the global and world leading knowledge-base of education. I refer to such explanations as living-educational-theories to distinguish these explanations from explanations **derived from** the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of disciplines of education, such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. As well as contributing to the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true I am suggesting as educational researchers at Edge Hill University we also contribute our living-educational-theories to the world leading ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted.

Introduction

The Living Educational Theory Research approach to the continuing professional development of staff in Higher Education (Whitehead, 2018), begins with the generation and sharing of living posters. Examples of these, from teachers in Higher Education around the world, will be accessed from

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>. Evidence of a successful educational influences in learning from this presentation is if it serves to stimulate you to generate and share your own living-poster from the details in the above homepage. I shall use a recent example of a living-poster from Suresh Nanwani Professor in Practice at Durham University, United Kingdom, and Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck University of London. He is an author, a writer, and an editor, who has more than 30 years of development work experience in international organizations. I shall also present Suresh Nanwani's latest book on Human Connections to demonstrate how Living Educational Theory Research can move on from a living-poster to a more extensive narrative that includes the researcher's living-educational-theory. In doing this I shall highlight Nanwani's integration of both Eastern and Western perspectives in generating a living-educational-theory with values of human flourishing with global significance.

The importance of academic staff in Higher Education, researching the educational influences in learning of their professional practice, will be stressed through access to two symposia presented by Living Educational Theory Researchers at the 2021 and 2022 Conferences of the American Educational Research Association (Delong et al., 2021& 2022):

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

<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/era21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf>

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 presentations 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>

It will be further highlighted through two presentations to the Network Educational Action Research Ireland Network (NEARI) meetings of the 29th January 2022 (see <http://www.eari.ie/2022/02/08/notes-from-nearimeet-29-january-2022/>) and the 2nd April 2022 (see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwNEARImeet020422.pdf>) and the Community Based Educational Research (COMBER) meeting of the 1st June 2022 (see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jw01JuneGeneralMeeting.pdf>).

These presentations focused on educational responsibility and equity as values of human flourishing as well as the importance of community based educational research in higher education for spreading the values of human flourishing. Accepting Wittgenstein's point that the meanings of the words we use are influenced by the context of their use, insights from Eastern perspectives will be drawn on to emphasise the importance of harmony, from a Hindu tradition, in the development of equity. In the AERA 2021-2022 symposia presentations, these insights were used together with insights from a Western academic tradition, from critical theory, in the generation of the living-educational-theories of professional educators in their research into teaching and learning in higher education.

To illustrate the academic legitimacy of the approach being used in this presentation, in world leading educational research, the presentation is related to recent global policy documents from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2022a &b) and the doctorates of Living Educational Theory Researchers from around the world. These will be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> together with the archive of publications between 2008-2021 in the Educational Journal of Living Theories at <https://ejolts.net/current>.

The Living Educational Theory Research approach to the continuing professional development of staff in Higher Education,

The approach often begins with the generation and sharing of living posters. Examples of these, from teachers in Higher Education around the world, can be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>. Evidence of a successful educational influences in learning of this presentation is if it serves to stimulate you to generate and share your own living-poster from the details in the above homepage. The recent example of a living-poster is from Suresh Nanwani (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/suresh22.pdf>). Nanwani is a Professor in Practice at Durham University, United Kingdom, and Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck University of London. He is an author, a writer, and an editor, who has more than 30 years of development work experience in international organizations. You can download a recent copy of a Nanwani's latest book on Human Connections (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/nanwani/nanwaniconnections.pdf>), to demonstrate how Living Educational Theory Research can move on from a living-poster to a more extensive narrative that includes the researcher's living-educational-theory. Nanwani integrates both Eastern and Western knowledge and wisdom perspectives in generating a living-educational-theory with values of human flourishing with global significance.

The importance of academic staff in Higher Education, researching the educational influences in learning of their professional practice, has been demonstrated in two symposia presented by Living Educational Theory Researchers at the 2021 and 2022 Conferences of the American Educational Research Association (Delong et al., 2021 - <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/era21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf> and 2022 - <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/AERA2022sessionprop.pdf>

The importance has been further demonstrated in two presentations to the Network Educational Action Research Ireland Network (NEARI) meetings of the 29th January 2022 (see <http://www.eari.ie/2022/02/08/notes-from-nearimeet-29-january-2022/>) and the 2nd April 2022 (see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwNEARImeet020422.pdf>), and the Community Based Educational Research (COMBER) meeting in South Africa of the 1st June 2022 (see - <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jw01JuneGeneralMeeting.pdf>).

These presentations focused on educational responsibility and equity as values of human flourishing (Frankl, 2019) as well as the importance of community based educational research in higher education for spreading the values of human flourishing. Accepting Wittgenstein's point that the meanings of the words we use are influenced by the context of their use, insights from Eastern perspectives were drawn on in the AERA symposia to emphasise the importance of harmony, from a Hindu tradition, in the development of equity. In the AERA 2021-2022 symposia presentations, these insights were used together with insights from a Western academic tradition, from critical theory, in the generation of the living-educational-theories of professional educators in their research into teaching and learning in higher education.

To illustrate the academic legitimacy of the approach, being used in this presentation to staff at Edge Hill University, the presentation is related to recent global policy documents from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2022a &b) and the doctorates of Living Educational Theory Researchers from around the world. The doctorates can be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> together with the archive of publications between 2008-2022 of the Educational Journal of Living Theories at <https://ejolts.net/current>.

In highlighting recent reports from UNESCO I want to focus on the contributions made by Budd Hall, a Co-Holder of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria. Hall (2015) in a presentation on 'Beyond Epistemicide: Knowledge Democracy and Higher Education' set out four questions that he was asking himself:

1. How do I 'decolonize', 'deracialise,' demasculinise and degender my inherited 'intellectual spaces?'
2. How do I support the opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic, and that have exercised dominance over (perhaps have even suffocated) intellectual and scholarly thought and writing?
3. How do I contribute to the building of new academic cultures and, more widely, new inclusive institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity – whether class, gender, national, linguistic, religious, sexual orientation, epistemological or methodological in nature?

4. How do I become a part of creating the new architecture of knowledge that allows co-construction of knowledge between intellectuals in academia and intellectuals located in community settings? (Hall, 2015, p.12)

I am highlighting the importance for academics in higher education, who wish to contribute to the flow of values of human flourishing, to ask, research and answer such 'I' questions. In highlighting such questions I accept Foucault's (1977) distinction between the 'specific intellectual' as opposed to the 'universal intellectual'. He says that for a long period the 'left' intellectual was acknowledged as a champion of truth and justice. The intellectual was a spokesperson of the universal in the sense of moral, theoretical and political choices. In opposition to the universal intellectual, he describes the specific intellectual in terms of an engagement in a struggle at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them. Foucault takes care to emphasise that by 'truth' he does not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted'. By 'truth', he means the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true. The struggles 'around truth' are not 'on behalf' of the truth, but about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. (Whitehead, 1993, p. 81):

The intellectual can operate and struggle at the general level of that regime of truth which is so essential to the structure and functioning of our society. 'There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth' — it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true', it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of 'science' and 'ideology', but in terms of 'truth' and 'power'. And thus the question of the professionalisation of intellectuals and the division between intellectual and manual labour can be envisaged in a new way. ((Foucault, p. 132)

My main point about the UNESCO documents, especially the one on shifting architectures of knowledge, is that they are grounded in Foucault's point that they are not focused on the ensemble of truths that are to be discovered and accepted, but rather on 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true'.

My focus on the 'I' research questions of academics in higher education who are seeking to enhance their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which their practice is located, is on the ensemble of truths about educational influences in learning that are to be discovered and accepted. My claim is that our educational research as researchers in Higher Education at Edge Hill University could become world leading by:

- i) making public the unique constellation of values that each one of us uses to give meaning and purpose to our lives;
- ii) establishing these values as the standards of judgement we use to evaluate improvements in our practice and to validate our contributions to educational knowledge.

The focus of the UNESCO documents, on Foucault's notion of the ensemble of rules, is limiting the perspectives offered by UNESCO for world leading educational research that enhances the flow of values of human flourishing through the generation and sharing of Living Educational Theory Research. I am suggesting that all academics at Edge Hill University and other Universities could enhance the flow of their values by asking, researching and answering our 'I' questions of the form, "How can I improve my practice as an academic in higher education?". By researching such questions, with Living Educational Theory Research, and accepting an educational responsibility for contributing to the global educational knowledgebase, I am suggesting that this will establish the educational research at Edge Hill University as world leading. It will do this through our contributions to educational knowledge with values of human flourishing.

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