Using Living Educational Theory and Action Research to Change Lives

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Abstract

This research is focused on explorations of the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?' We draw on insights from Action Research in our use of action-reflection cycles. These cycles involve a practitioner exploring and resolving concerns when they experience their values negated by imagining ways to improve matters, developing an action plan, which includes acting and gathering data for making a judgement on the effectiveness of the actions; evaluating the effectiveness of the actions with respect to the espoused values the practitioner embodies and modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluation. Living Educational Theory Research requires the practitioner to generate and make publicly accessible 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 research drawn on in this paper includes the publicly accessible living-educational-theories and research of a broad range of practitioners working diverse contexts such as South Africa, the UK, Republic of Ireland, Nepal, India, Pakistan, the USA, Australia, China and the Philippines. These researchers hold themselves accountable for developing practice, which brings into being a world imbued with values of human flourishing for the common good. In doing this, they clarify, evolve and communicate the embodied meanings of the values they use to evaluate the efficacy of their practice and as explanatory principles in their own living-educational-theories. We offer our research as a contribution to the conference particularly with respect to the foci identified by the sub-themes: community action and activism; knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; social Justice and equity; educational and educative change; critical pedagogies; social cohesion; methodological rigour and innovation.

Introduction

As demonstrated below, in our Living Educational Theory doctoral research, we have changed our lives and influenced changes in the lives of others as we explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?' We distinguish

Living Educational Theory Research from other forms of research by the necessary condition of practitioner-researchers generating their own valid, evidence and values-based explanations of their educational influence in their own learning in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. Whitehead (1989) coined the term living-educational-theory for these explanations.

We draw on insights from Action Research in our use of action-reflection cycles. These cycles involve a practitioner exploring and resolving concerns when they experience their values negated by imagining ways to improve matters, developing an action plan, which includes acting and gathering data for making a judgement on the effectiveness of the actions; evaluating the effectiveness of the actions with respect to the espoused values the practitioner embodies and modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluation. As they do so they clarify, evolve and communicate the embodied meanings of the values they use to evaluate the efficacy of their practice and as explanatory principles in their own living-educational-theories.

We engage in Living Educational Theory Research as a particular form of professional practitioner educational research in order to improve our contribution to the learning of individuals and communities to bring into being a more peaceful world where people's humanity can flourish. We draw insights from the knowledge of others including that created in other disciplines and by a broad range of practitioner researchers working in diverse contexts such as South Africa, the UK, Republic of Ireland, Nepal, India, Pakistan, the USA, Australia, China and the Philippines (see the living-posters homepage at https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf and Living Educational Theory Research doctorates accessible from https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml. These researchers hold themselves accountable for living as fully as they can values of human flourishing for the common good. We recognise that tensions and contradictions can exist within the 'living boundaries' (Huxtable, 2012) of relationships when there are differences between individuals and cultures about what constitutes the common good. We advocate practitioners extend their cognitive range and concern to improve how they live with / resolve these tensions by critically and creatively engaging with knowledge created within the human science disciplines and through the use of a range of methodologies such as Action Research, Autoethnography, Self-Study and Narrative Inquiry.

The research has been analysed elsewhere (Whitehead, 2022a; Huxtable 2022a; Whitehead & Huxtable 2022) with respect to the conference sub-themes of: community action and activism; knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; Improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; social justice and equity; educational and educative change; critical pedagogies; social cohesion; methodological rigour and innovation. Here we offer a further analysis of the outcomes and original contributions to educational knowledge with particular respect to the implications for improving practice in the face of adversity and realising in practice values of justice, equity and social cohesion.

1) **Changing ourselves through our Living Educational Theory Research**

In including ourselves in questions of the kind 'How do I improve what I am doing?' it is important we say something about the meaning of 'I' and the meaning of 'self' in 'changing our selves'. It is the 'practitioner self', the 'relational self, that is seeking to improve professional practice rather than the self that psychological therapy is concerned with, important though this is. It is the 'self' Huxtable (2012, p. 32-33) tried to communicate a meaning of when she wrote:

> A sense of my self as distinct and unique, but also at one with others in 'an infinity which reaches beyond', is important to me. It is the essence of what I want to communicate by ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility and inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian social values. The clarification and expression of these values is at the core of the research narrated in this thesis. The conundrum of how to hold 'i' and 'we' together in an 'i~we' relationship (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2006) that flows with these values is expressed for me in the words of Hillel, which have stayed with me since I first read them as a child:
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>> 'If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?' (Ethics of the Fathers, Pirkei Avot, 1:14)

I am using 'i' and 'we' to point to self and collective that is neither subordinate nor superordinate, but exist in an egalitarian relationship. It is a similar sense I make of Ubuntu that Nelson Mandela expresses in this brief (1.37) video clip. 'Respect, helpfulness, sharing, community, caring, trust, unselfishness', come up on the screen followed by, 'One word can mean so much.' At 0.19 Tim Modise introduces the interview with, 'Many people consider you as a personification of Ubuntu. What do you understand Ubuntu to be?' It is not just reading the few words that Mandela speaks that I understand Ubuntu but it is through the intonation of his voice, his body and his way of being that communicates Ubuntu personified in these few seconds of video.

Video 1. Nelson Mandela on Ubuntu
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODQ4WiDsEBQ

Whitehead (1999) has provided the evidence to justify his claim to have changed himself through his Living Educational Theory Research through his doctoral inquiry, 'How do I

improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry' (See https://www.actionresearch.net/living/jackwhitehead2.shtml)

Whitehead (1999) analyses changes in himself through the course of his research published between 1977-1999. The analysis proceeds from the experience of himself, his 'I', as a living contradiction in the question 'How do I improve this process of education here?' Whitehead developed his living-educational-theory methodology, including 'I' as a living contradiction, from the application of a four-fold classification of methodologies of the social sciences that he demonstrated was too limited to offer a comprehensive understanding of his methodology. Then the idea of living-educational-theories emerged in terms of the descriptions and explanations which individual learners produce for their own educational development.

A logic of the question, 'How do I improve my practice? also emerges from his engagement with the ideas of others and from an exploration of the question in the practical contradictions between the power of truth and the truth of power in his workplace. A discipline of education, with its standards of originality of mind and critical judgement, emerges from practitioner-research into his educative influences as a professional educator in the enquiry, 'How do I help you to improve your learning?', with values of human flourishing.

Whitehead's living-educational-theory continues to develop as he researches the question, 'How do I live my values more fully in my practice?'. In accounts of his current Living Educational Theory Research, such as this one, he includes what he intends to do to live his values more fully in the future. His action plan includes what he intends doing to deepen his understandings of various people's embodied meanings of Ubuntu as a way of being and to promote cultures of inquiry (Delong, 2002) within communities of practice formed by practitioners developing their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research. He explains his present practice in terms of an evaluation of his past learning, in terms of his present experiences of spiritual, aesthetic and ethical contradictions in his educative relations.

In 1993 Whitehead published an analysis of what he did to improve his practice in the face of adversity. Whitehead, J. (1993) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge. Creating Your Own Living Educational Theories*. The purpose of presenting the contents of the book below is that this enables us to point to the following 'living contradictions' in chapters 2, 4, 6 & 8. In responding to these' living contradictions' Whitehead provides the evidence on how he changed his own life in the course of generating his own living-educational-theory research.

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

Huxtable (2012) has provided the evidence to justify her claim to have changed herself through Living Educational Theory Research, in the course of her doctoral research as illustrated by the abstract of her thesis:

My educational practice is concerned with enhancing children and young persons' abilities to learn to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life, for themselves and others. This thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge as a multimedia narrative. It communicates my ontological values of a loving recognition, respectful connectedness and educational responsibility, and social values of an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian society. I clarify meanings of my values, as they emerge within living-boundaries through the evolution of my living-theory praxis, to form explanatory principles and living standards of judgment in my claim to know my practice.

Working as a senior educational psychologist responsible for implementing policy on high ability learning, I experienced the following concerns: Practice, theory and research often appeared to lose connection with the purpose of education; Theory and practice appeared to be developed independently, and without explanation or evaluation related to values of education; Those involved with education appeared to be in discrete worlds, each vying to exert their hegemony over the totalising development of educational theory, practice and provision.

Emerging from my research I offer four original ideas:

1) Living-Educational-Theory praxis, highlighting the fundamental importance of educators creating 'values-based explanation of their educational influences in learning' (Whitehead, 1989a), as they research to develop praxis within living-boundaries.

2) Living-boundaries as co-creative space within which energy-flowing values can be clarified and communicated.

3) Inclusive gifted and talented education developed from an educational perspective, which enables each learner to develop and offer talents, expertise and knowledge as life-affirming and life-enhancing gifts. The knowledge is that created of the world, of self, and self in and of the world.

4) Living-Theory TASC, a relationally-dynamic and multidimensional approach to research and developing praxis, which integrates Living-Theory (Whitehead, 1989a) with Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace and Adams, 1993).

Evidence of the educational influence in her learning to develop practice, which brings into being a world imbued with values of human flourishing for the common good, engaging in Living Educational Theory Research to generate her thesis has had, is provided by what she offers 10 years later in the paper, *Can educational psychology develop to meet the challenges, choices and changes of a 21st century world?* (Huxtable, 2022, p.454):

… adopting Living Educational Theory Research as continuing professional development enables an educational psychologist to improve practice and realise their responsibilities as a member of a profession, as a member of the social formations within which they practice and as a member of Humanity. I conclude by inviting you to test my claim yourself in practice.

Huxtable offers further evidence of the educational influence in learning to develop practice, which brings into being a world imbued with values of human flourishing for the common good, continuing to extend her knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research has had. For example, she gives a brief account of how she has tried to contribute to the evolution of the Educational Journal of Living Theories.

The story of how EJOLTs has developed since its conception is one which includes the development of: community action and activism; knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; social Justice and equity; educational and educative change; critical pedagogies; social cohesion; methodological rigour and innovation. When Huxtable took up the position of chair / lead of the EJOLTs Editorial Board she was committed to trying to answer a question that comes from Branko Bognar, 'How do we develop our democratic ways of creating EJOLTs together?' The 'we' comprised members of the Editorial Board and Development Team. Since then, a conversation with Branko Bognar gave her some insight into the different meanings in practice of 'democracy', which developed as she learned about the international cooperative movement (https://www.ica.coop). Most lately Peter Mellett has caused her to amend the question to 'how can we develop our cooperative democratic ways of creating EJOLTs together? being mindful that the value of Living Educational Theory Research is that engaging in it brings into being a world imbued with values of human flourishing for the common good.

Over the years Huxtable has worked with the Editorial Board to develop review processes and procedures, which conform to those common to most, if not all, peer-reviewed journals, and are consistent with the cooperative democratic educational values of EJOLTs and Living Educational Theory Research:

> At the heart of Living Educational Theory Research is the realisation in practice of humanitarian and life-enhancing values, which contribute to a world in which humanity can increasingly flourish…
>
> *Living Educational Theory research is a form of professional practitioner self-study educational research that enables anyone, whatever their location, discipline or field of practice to: accept their responsibility for their practice; realise their professional responsibilities as a practitioner and global citizen to contribute to the knowledgebase/s of their community of practice and; contribute to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase which brings into being a world where humanity can increasingly flourish -* https://ejolts.net/about

In accounts of her current Living Educational Theory Research, such as this one, Huxtable includes what she intends to do to live her values more fully in the future, for example continuing to support people and communities to develop their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research as CPD and Community Based Educational Research and help others to do so too (see https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf).

Interim Conclusion

Finally, in our analysis of using Living Educational Theory Research and insights from action-reflection cycles to change lives, we are focusing on our present day collaborations with staff at the University of Cumbria in the UK, with Nelson Mandela University, North West University, Durban University of Technology, the University of the Free State in South Africa

and alumni of Limerick University in the Republic of Ireland, in developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to our continuing professional development. For example these activities include working with Linda Ntombovuyo, Muano Nethengwe, Jessica Jacobs, Awongiwe Magutywa and Liyema Mpompi members of Nelson Mandela University (image 2).

Image 2. Clockwise from the top left, Marie Huxtable, Linda Ntombovuyo, Jack Whitehead, Muano Nethengwe, Jessica Jacobs, Awongiwe Magutywa and Liyema Mpompi in virtual meeting of Living Educational Theory Research COMBER group, Nelson Mandela University.

We are also working and researching with Ubuntu as a valued way of being in human flourishing, with staff at North-West University, Durban University of Technology and the University of the Free State. 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

Whitehead (2011) presented the Inaugural Nelson Mandela lecture at Durban University of Technology in which he explained the importance of an Ubuntu way of being in the values of human flourishing that can be used as explanatory principles in Living Educational Theory Research (See Whitehead, J. (2011) Notes for Jack Whitehead's Mandela Day Lecture on the 18th July 2011 in Durban, South Africa, with a 63 minute video of the presentation – Retrieved from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmandeladay2011.pdf). Whitehead also supervised Eden Charles (2007) doctorate on 'How Can I Bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard of Judgement Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition'. Retrieved from https://www.actionresearch.net/living/edenphd.shtml . We are holding ourselves accountable for living as fully as possible an Ubuntu way of being as a value of human flourishing in our living-educational-theories.

In the centre of the homepage of living-posters are guidelines on how to develop and share your own living-posters. We 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 we are also focusing on the importance of visual digital data in communicating, with empathetic empathy (Whitehead, 2010; Huxtable, 2009) the meanings of embodied values and their integration into evidence and values-based explanations of educational influences in learning. We are thinking particularly of the embodied expressions of Ubuntu ways of being in values of human flourishing. Whitehead's appointment until 2025, at North West University, as Extraordinary Professor of Community-Based Educational Research also gives us an opportunity to sustain our engagement with the above groups. It may be that we can contribute to an evolving relationship between the following universities as they consider signing a memorandum of understanding with the following areas of focus (image 3):

Image 3. Areas of focus in proposed memorandum of understanding between Nelson Mandela University (SA), Limerick University (Ireland) and Free State University (SA)

As we continue to research our use of Living Educational Theory Research and insights from action-reflection cycles, in contributing to change lives, we will continue to evaluate our educational influences in relation to the conference sub-themes of: Community action and activism; Knowledge ecologies and knowledge democratisation; Improving practice in the face of adversity and pandemics; Including diverse voices and perspectives; Social Justice and equity; Educational and educative change; Critical pedagogies; Social cohesion; Methodological rigour and innovation (Whitehead, 2022a & Huxtable, 2022a) We also intend to clarify and communicate the embodied meaning of Ubuntu as a way of being in values of human flourishing, in our explanations of educational influences in learning.

As we learn more about the educational influences of our community-based educational research, we are hoping that our presentation today has encouraged you to work with us on extending the systemic influence of Living Educational Theory Research with values of human flourishing. In particular, we are hoping that you will share details of your context and research in a living-poster, in accounts of your research that you submit to the Educational Journal of Living Theories and through sharing your presentations at conferences of practitioner, educational researchers.

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