

Global Living Theory Research on Re-imagining Education

For presentation at the BERA event at the University of Worcester on 'Global Perspectives: Re-imagining Education' on the 21-22nd June 2019

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This paper is focused on the contribution made through Global Living Theory Research on Re-imagining Education in relation to the conference foci on inclusion, sharing knowledge globally, curriculum design and its impact on knowledge generation, globalising teacher education, developing evidence-informed practice and self-improving systems, diversity, global citizenship, and intercultural education.

It analyses Living Theory projects in India, Pakistan, South Africa, the UK, North America and Mongolia to show how they are supporting the UNESCO Education 2030 goals of the development high-quality sustainable education for all across the world. The Living Theory practitioners include researchers, academics, consultants, practitioners, teachers, research students and professionals working in international development, curriculum development, educational policy and practice.

The analysis includes evidence from multi-media narratives, using digital technologies such as Skype and wikis to sustain connections with others in supporting research-informed practice in global contexts.

Living Theory research includes individuals producing and sharing explanations of educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. The explanatory principles include the individual's ontological values that they use to give meaning and purpose to their lives. These values are inspired by the 2030 goals of a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability.

Introduction

The focus of the paper is on Global Living Theory Research on Re-imagining Education exemplified through the story of Potts' research from the creation of his doctoral thesis on living global citizenship to his current work 'enhancing the democratic process through more deliberative forms of democracy'. Evidence from other Living Theory practitioners working in contexts that include India, Pakistan, South Africa, the UK, North America and Mongolia is also included to show how Living Theory research is contributing to the realisation of the UNESCO Education 2030 goals of the development high-quality sustainable education for all across the world. The Living Theory practitioners include researchers, academics, consultants, practitioners, teachers, research students and professionals working in international development, curriculum development, educational policy and practice.

The paper starts with a brief overview of **Living Theory research** as a research methodology which has educational implications for researchers as they research their practice to understand and improve it and generate a valid account of their living-theory, a term coined by Whitehead (Whitehead, 1989). A researcher's living-theory is a valid, values-based account of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of local and global social formations. The explanatory principles include the individual's living and embodied life-affirming and life-enhancing values that give meaning and purpose to their lives. Researchers' living-theories contribute to a global educational knowledge-base and the realisation of re-imagining education with a humanistic vision.

The idea of **living global citizenship** (Potts, 2012) is introduced as a contribution to global Living Theory research on re-imagining education. This idea is related to the 2030 UNESCO goals of a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability. Living global citizenship is related to the conference foci on inclusion, sharing knowledge globally, curriculum design and its impact on knowledge generation, globalising teacher education, developing evidence-informed practice and self-improving systems, diversity, global citizenship, and intercultural education.

Digital technologies, such as Skype and wikis, have been used to sustain connections with others engaged in, and supporting, research-informed practice in global contexts, and with the generation and sharing of Living Theory research. The analysis includes evidence drawn from the multi-media narratives to illustrate how technology has been used to support **Living Theory researchers around the world contributing to global Living Theory research re-imagining education**.

The paper ends with an **interim conclusion** and an invitation to contribute to our global conversations concerned with recognising and making a re-imagined humanistic vision of education a reality, as much as is possible in the here and now around the globe.

Living Theory research

Living Theory research is initially focussed by questions such as, 'how can I improve this process of education here?' and progresses to the researcher producing, validating and sharing explanations of educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings (Whitehead 1989, 2018). The

explanatory principles include the individual's life-affirming and life-enhancing values that they use to give meaning and purpose to their lives. The values are clarified as they emerge in the course of the research.

In asking 'I' questions about improvement, Living Theory researchers experience themselves as living contradictions in the sense that they hold together the values that give meaning and purpose to their together, with their negation. They also recognise and experience the tensions of seeking to live their values within contexts where they experience many of their values contradicted. In responding to these contradictions Living Theory researchers often use an action-reflections cycles of expressing concerns; imagining possible ways forward and creating an action plan; acting and gathering data to make a judgment on the educational influences of the actions; evaluating the educational influence of the actions; modifying concerns, ideas and actions in the light of the evaluations; producing and sharing a validated, evidence-based explanation of the researcher's educational influences in their own learning and the learning of others (and perhaps in the learning of the social formations that are influencing practice and understandings).

These values-based explanations are referred to as an individual's living-educational-theory, shortened to living-theory. A living-theory is hyphenated to distinguish an individual's explanation from the conceptualised understandings that distinguish Living Theory research.

Living Theory research is an educational process as well as generating a living-theory, a 'product' with an educational potential. It is an educational process because it involves learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity – mine, yours, ours and us as a species.

As with all research it is important for explanations to withstand criticism. In Living Theory research, validation groups are established, usually between 3-8 peers, to respond to draft explanations with the aim of strengthening the validity of the explanation. They do this by responding to questions that include:

How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?

How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the claims I make?

How could I deepen and extend my understanding of the socio-historical and socio-cultural influences in my explanation of educational influence?

How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing that I am living my values as fully as possible?

The living-theories produced through Living Theory research contribute to re-imagining education on a global scale. This is illustrated below through references to the work of Mark Potts, whose Living Theory doctoral research gave rise to his original contribution to knowledge of 'living global citizenship' (Potts, 2012).

Living global citizenship

In his original contribution to educational knowledge Potts (2012) explored the implications of asking, researching and answering his question, How can I Reconceptualise International Educational Partnerships as a Form of 'Living Citizenship'? The originality was in bringing 'living citizenship' into the Academy as a valid standard of judgment in educational knowledge:

The project looks at how over a ten year period the partnership activities between Salisbury High School and Nqabakazulu School in the black township of Kwamashu in Durban, South Africa have influenced the education of the participants.

The original contribution emerged from:

An examination of the notion of 'Living Citizenship' and exemplification of it in practice through engagement in the activities of an international educational partnership.

Potts worked closely with his supervisor, Coombs, to refine his ideas, successfully submitting his doctoral thesis and also to bring 'living citizenship' to the attention of academics through collaborating on papers and conference presentations such as their 2012 paper (Coombs and Potts 2012):

This paper explores the conceptual framework of "Living Citizenship" as a means for developing international continuing professional development (i-CPD) through action research projects. The research focuses on videocases that present findings from the development of an international educational partnership between two schools in England and South Africa. Adapting Whitehead's (2005) living educational theory approach to action research, "Living Citizenship" supports and problematises international educational partnerships' through the influence of enabling participants' as critically active citizens. Such pro-active fieldwork links the values and objectives of social justice and knowledge exchange to proffering educational change within authentic i-CPD professional learning environments.

Potts continued to contribute to re-imagining education with a humanistic vision through his post-doctoral research. For instance, collaborating with Coombs and Whitehead to co-author a book on 'International Educational Development and Learning through Sustainable Partnerships' (Coombs, Potts and Whitehead, 2014) where they explored the implications of developing living citizenship in a global context.

Potts summarises his continuing learning journey as follows:

When I retired from being a Deputy Head in a state comprehensive school I was also beginning a post-doctoral journey as a participative action researcher seeking to continue to live out my values as a global citizen. The challenge for me was to continue being a living theory action researcher whilst engaging with real world politics. My desire to continue to live out my values as a living-global-citizen and of cultural empathy led me to move from action research into political activism.

The vote to leave the EU in June 2016 was the catalyst for me to become more active in politics as it ran counter to my belief in cultural empathy. Some of the campaign messages were culturally disempathetic in the sense that they lacked appreciation of other cultures and sought to exploit divisions in society. My belief in democracy was shaken and it led me to consider how I could enhance the democratic process through more deliberative forms of democracy. This was the motivation for my involvement in the development of Democracy Cafes and Citizen's Assemblies starting in my hometown of Salisbury, UK.

As Mannsbridge et al (2012) say, deliberative democracy offers a way of restoring confidence in democratic institutions, ensuring **all voices are heard** and opportunities for participants to make judgements based on **collective wisdom**. It promises more **inclusive** and legitimate forms of political authority, more **informed decisions** and a **more active account of citizenship**. It is based on the principle that all citizens are entitled to participate in the process of political dialogue and have an equal right to introduce and question claims, to put forward reasons, to express and challenge needs, values and interests.

Two of us started running a Democracy Cafe in Salisbury in September 2017. The participants suggest topics for discussion and a vote is held to decide on the chosen topic. Participants present their views on the issue and are heard respectfully whilst being challenged, leading to a thorough discussion of the issues. The idea is to bring in to the open impulses, feelings and opinions on these matters so that they can be seen and reflected back by others in the group. The discussion does not necessarily reach a conclusion and usually raises more questions than answers. There is a facilitator to encourage contributions from participants and to ensure participants listen to and respect views expressed.

The Salisbury cafe continues monthly and has since been replicated in Oxford and Southampton. We have also run democracy cafes in schools. In addition, we are in discussion with our City Council to run a citizen's assembly on how to tackle climate change. This would bring together a stratified cross section of the local community to hear evidence from experts and to come up with recommendations to the Council. Both of these activities are examples of how I am living out my values as a living-global-citizen in order to enhance my own learning, the learning of others and to influence the social formations in which we are operating.

Burgess (2019) has explained that she is drawn to understand more about Living Global Citizenship in her reflections on her experiences of the Democracy Cafes in Salisbury supported by Mark Potts in his post-doctoral enquiries.

Living Theory researchers around the world contributing to global Living Theory research re-imagining education.

The work of Potts is not in isolation. It is contributing to a global educational knowledgebase created by and with educational practitioner researchers around the world who share a desire to make a humanistic vision of education an increasing reality. The evidence offered here is from practitioner-researchers in India, Pakistan, South Africa, the UK, North America and Mongolia. The Living Theory practitioners include researchers, academics, consultants, practitioners, teachers, research students and professionals working in international development, curriculum development, educational policy and practice.

For example Bruce Damon (2017) in his doctoral thesis from South Africa, 'A Collaboratively Constructed Process Model For Understanding And Supporting The Work Of The Community Volunteer In A Community School' and Sadruddin Qutoshi's doctoral thesis, 'Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education In Pakistan', illustrate Living Theory researchers, like Mark Potts (2012) in the UK, living a re-imagined education as a values-based process explaining educational influence in learning and the influence it has on the

learning of others and social formations. Sadruddin Qutoshi's thesis offers a curriculum for re-imagining teacher education in Pakistan.

The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) also makes freely accessible multimedia narratives of the educational knowledge created by educational practitioners working in various fields of practice around the world. The introduction to the June 2019 12(1) issue and the papers illustrates this point:

Introduction

"We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations." (Gandhiji)

We recognize the enduring vision of Mahatma Gandhi's values as we research and locate our practice to create knowledge derived from the embodiment of our values and finding ways of living lives that are life-affirming for all. In June 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations responded to Mahatma Gandhi's call to action by establishing the International Day of Non-Violence. It is celebrated around the world on his birthday-2 October. To mark the 150th anniversary of Gandhiji's birth and in a gesture of solidarity we invite you to learn about the educational influence he has had in the learning, life and work of Swaroop, a Living Theory researcher, whose work is recognised as nationally and internationally influential. We hope Swaroop's poster will inspire you to respond to Gandhiji's call to action by creating and making public your explanations of your educational influence in your own learning, the learning of others and the learning of groups, communities and nations, and help others do the same.

"Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all - children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in ... equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts." Gandhiji.

Papers

[***Dialogical relationships in living cultures of inquiry for the creation of living-theories***](#) (pp. 1-22)

Jacqueline Delong - Canada

[***Forming a 'We' through a good-quality conversation***](#) (pp. 23-61)

Jerome Gumede and Peter Mellett – South Africa and UK

[***Learning who I am: The exploration of my guiding values through a Living Theory methodology***](#) (pp. 62-80)

Michelle Vaughan – USA

[***How do I improve my practice of training midwives and nurses in the use of Q-Pulse?***](#) (pp. 81-102)

Anne Jesudason - Ireland

Why is the creation and sharing of living-theories through 'multimedia narratives' important? Because a humanistic vision of education is concerned with enhancing learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity; the flourishing of my humanity, the flourishing of your humanity, the flourishing of our collective humanity and the flourishing of Humanity as a species. We each and all live in, and are part of, a complex ecology formed by relationships between people and peoples and the world we inhabit. Text alone is often not adequate to the task of communicating the nuanced expression of values such as dignity, respect and love. This realisation, and the desire to make educational knowledge freely accessible globally, informed the creation of EJOLTs as an online journal. Further examples of multimedia narratives created by educational practitioners living and working in diverse cultures, contexts and fields of practice can be accessed from <https://ejolts.net>. To learn more about Living Theory research there is a 3-minute video on the homepage of <http://www.ejolts.net> with an introductory video at (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=VoCwS89m1jo)

Use is now being made by Living Theory researchers of opportunities to create their own websites (free and easy to use platform, no technical skills needed) to make public the educational knowledge they are creating, for example:

- Joy Mounter, <http://www.spanglefish.com/allicanbe/>,
- Jacqueline Delong, <http://www.spanglefish.com/ActionResearchCanada/>,
- Moira Laidlaw, <http://www.spanglefish.com/moiralaidlawshomepage/>.
- Munkh-Undar. Ts and Myagmarsuren. O. <http://www.spanglefish.com/Undra/index.asp>

And to provide a community resource such as

<http://www.spanglefish.com/Livingvaluesimprovingpracticecooperatively/>

Other open source software is similarly being used, for instance Mellett (2019) proposed the idea of a Wiki of Living Educational Theory and introduced the Wiki accessible at, http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main_Page.

By browsing down this page of the Wiki you can access details of participants with their focus questions. For example, you can access Peter Mellett's focus question, 'A living theory paper is an account of educational enquiry leading towards improvement: how can I translate the improvement described and explained in the paper into improvement in my life and educational practice?' at: <http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Pete>

With the review of his question accessible at:

http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Pete%27s_Question

Social media sites are also beginning to be used to provide a supportive community, such as the [Living Theory Research](#) Facebook group.

Other uses have been made of digital technology to support educationalists creating educational knowledge and making it as widely accessible as possible. Huxtable (2019) proposed the idea of living-posters to help to connect individuals in different (global) contexts to learn something about each other's values, contexts, sites of practices and living-theories. Living-posters include:

- Creating and uploading a 2-3minute video-clip to YouTube of you communicating the essentials of: your context, interests, research passions, practice and values as the

explanatory principles and living standards of judgment to which you hold yourself accountable in your practice.

- Creating an attractive A4 poster including text and images, and the url to your YouTube video, which provides brief details of your: context; interests; the values that motivate you and give your life meaning and purpose; research passions; details of a few of your key publications; the url to your website if you have one and your contact details.
- Sending us two files of your living poster i) as a PDF and ii) in whatever programme you have used to create it e.g. WORD, Pages, PowerPoint. Please use 'insert' (not copy and paste) and use low resolution images otherwise your file becomes huge!
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/livingposterletterA.pdf>

You can access the 2018 homepage of living-posters at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage020617.pdf>

Updated homepages of living-posters can be accessed from the What's New section of <http://www.actionresearch.net>. The 2019 update will be available in July 2019.

Interim Conclusion

This paper has been focused by Global Living Theory research on re-imagining education. At the heart of this research are our individual living-theories with our unique constellations of values that motivate us to live them as fully as possible and include living global citizenship. The re-imagining education is focused on explanations of educational influences in learning.

Do please explore further what others have been offering by visiting their living-posters, the Educational Journal of Living Theories, the Wiki of Living Educational Theory and the Living Theory research Facebook group. You can access these in the What's New section of <http://www.actionresearch.net>

You could strengthen the global social movement of Living Theory researchers by researching your own practice to understand and improve it and sharing your explanation of your educational influence in your own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of local and global social formations. By doing this we could enhance the contribution to making the world a better place to be through to spreading the influence of Living Theory research with the values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

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