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Living Co-operative Values in Educational Contexts

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In this paper we offer an argument that a Co-operative University could make a distinctive contribution by focusing on the development of educational contexts and epistemology with co-operative values forming the explanatory principles and standards by which practice and knowledge is recognised, understood and judged. We believe that individual practitioner-researchers can make a contribution to the realisation of co-operative values in practice by generating and sharing their explanations of educational influences in learning as they work and research, to live as fully as possible values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity. The values focused on are those of the International Co-operative Alliance.

We show how Living Theory research is particularly appropriate for researchers developing educational contexts and knowledge. Through this paper we offer an evidence-based argument to demonstrate how a Co-operative University could support the creation and legitimisation of educational knowledge and so strengthen the realisation in practice of personal and cultural co-operative values. We illustrate how this can be done by supporting practitioner-researchers exploring the implications of asking, researching, and answering questions of the kind, “How do I improve what I am doing and live my co-operative values as fully as possible?” and legitimising the educational knowledge created.

Introduction

People tell stories to understand and transform their lives, and so it is with communities, organisations, and nations. There is never a single story but rather many vying for dominance. Currently the dominant story, in this and many other countries, is one of competition grounded in neoliberal economics. A Co-operative University could contribute to a transforming story of co-operation. In this paper we offer an argument that a Co-operative University could make a distinctive contribution by focusing on the development and academic legitimisation, of knowledge with co-operative values forming the explanatory principles and standards by which practice and knowledge is recognised, understood, and judged.

Universities have many purposes but for most a core purpose is to support the generation, validation, and making public, valid academic and scholarly knowledge. The nature of the knowledge created in a university is often simply conceived of as knowledge that progresses a discipline or field of practice. What is often missed is that a university is also a seat of higher education, and education is concerned with the expressions of life-affirming and life-enhancing values in the development of our individual and collective humanity. Ginott shows the importance of clarifying the meaning of “education”:

On the first day of the new school year, all the teachers in one private school received the following note from their principal.

Dear Teacher,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:

- Gas chambers built by learned engineers.
- Children poisoned by educated physicians.
- Infants killed by trained nurses.
- Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human (Ginott, 1972: 317).

These sentiments are as important for those creating a university as a place for higher education to keep in mind, as they are for those concerned with primary and secondary education. Similarly, it is important that universities, as well as schools, clarify their *raison d'être* as seats of higher education before focusing on the curricula they offer. Reiss and White (2013: 1) asked, “what are schools for?” and answered:

In very general terms, their aims are the same as those of a home with children. The task of both institutions is two-fold and simplicity itself, to equip each child:

- To lead a life that is personally flourishing.
- To help others to do so, too.

So, “what are universities for?” and more particularly “what is a Co-operative University for?” An answer we will focus on in this paper is one that builds on what Reiss and White (2013) and Ginott (1972) have said:

In very general terms, the purpose of a Co-operative University as a seat of higher education is to equip and support people to:

- Generate and make public academic and scholarly knowledge that contributes to the flourishing of humanity; their own humanity, the humanity of other people and that of communities locally, nationally and globally, and to progress a discipline and/or field of practice; AND
- Enhance their educational influence in their own learning, the educational learning of others, and the educational learning of communities locally, nationally and globally for the flourishing of humanity.

Support may be in the form of:

- Creating a co-operative research context for people to generate, validate, and make public knowledge; and
- A co-operative educational context for people to learn skills and acquire knowledge.

We emphasise that co-operative values are at the heart of both enterprises as nothing is created in a vacuum and we are all interconnected, as John Donne wrote:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main ... (Donne, 1662).

The African notion of Ubuntu, as translated into English, expresses the relational dynamic that exists between an individual and others succinctly as, “I am because we are”. We extend that by adding “We are because I am”, which we have represented as *i~we~i*. We use *i~we* as the nomenclature for communicating this quality of relationship of Ubuntu with *~* to emphasise the mutual influence of the ‘individual’ and the ‘collective’. This mutual influence can be represented as *i~we~i*:

We use “I” and “we” to point to a relationship where individuals and collectives are neither subordinated nor dominant but exist in an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian relationship. We use *~* to stand for living-boundaries (Huxtable, 2012): trustworthy, respectful, co-creative space, where individuals, collectives and the complex worlds of practice, knowledge and socio-historical cultures they inhabit and embody, touch (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2015: 1).

To explain the nature of the educational knowledge that a Co-operative University could offer a lead on developing, we draw on the values described by the International Co-operative Alliance:

Co-operatives are based on the values of **self-help**, **self-responsibility**, **democracy**, **equality**, **equity**, and **solidarity**. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others (International Co-operative Alliance, 2018).

As illustrated above by the extract from Ginott (1972), “education” can have many meanings not all would be understood as educational. Biesta (2006) identifies the importance of being

clear about the language we use, when he writes, “Something has been lost in the shift from the language of education to the language of learning” (Biesta, 2006: 14) and argues that we need to develop an educational language. He also said:

... education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their ‘coming into the world’ as unique, singular beings (Biesta, 2006: 27).

So before going further we wish to be clear that by “educational” we have in mind the life-long process of an individual learning to come into the world as a unique singular human being learning to live human and humane qualities such as vitality, humour, warmth, love, curiosity, creativity, interconnectedness, a vibrant flow of a loving life-affirming and life-enhancing energy; human beings learning to live their Ikigai (figure 1 below). These human qualities and co-operative values, so poorly communicated through simple words on a page, are what distinguish the knowledge we seek to offer as educational.

Figure 1: Ikigai (Pasricha, 2016)



SOURCE: dreamstime

TORONTO STAR GRAPHIC

There are many forms of learning. Educational learning is learning that contributes to the flourishing of humanity: the flourishing of us as a species and the flourishing of the humanitarian values of each and every one of us. Our ontological and social values are what give meaning and purpose to our lives. Values evolve, shape, and are shaped by how we each experience our social and personal historical contexts. Values, as Crompton (2010) demonstrates in his

publications, drawing on Schwartz's work, may be broadly thought of as extrinsic and self-enhancing, or intrinsic and self-transcending. It is the latter that we wish to foreground here in relationship to the development of a Co-operative University for reasons Smith and Crompton summarise in the forward to the report, *No Cause is an Island: How People are Influenced by Values Regardless of the Cause*:

Proportionate responses to today's most pressing social and environmental challenges are unforeseeable, other than in the context of far broader and deeper public demand for change. The new research presented in this report helps to highlight how such a movement for change might be built: by working with an understanding of the values that motivate public expressions of concern – almost regardless of social or environmental 'cause'.

This research also epitomises a new way of working. It was only possible because of collaboration across continents, and across the academic and charity sectors.

And:

... it seems that messages invoking intrinsic, self-transcendence values are the most effective, regardless of how important a person holds these values to be (Crompton et al, 2014: 5).

It is the intrinsic, self-transcending values that characterise educational knowledge that we want to bring more clearly into the discourse concerning the development of a Co-operative University as a seat of higher education. A Co-operative University could lead the way for universities to realise their 'higher education' purpose as well as equipping people to contribute to sustainable global prosperity, which by necessity has to be co-operative rather than competitive. The Japanese notion of *Ikigai* (translated into English as meaning "a reason for being") helps to us to see how individual existential flourishing, the flourishing of humanity and contributing to the modern world dominated by economics, can be brought together harmoniously, as figure 1 above illustrates.

Living Theory research offers a methodology that is particularly appropriate for members of a university community, such as that of a Co-operative University. It is characterised by a concern with generating educational knowledge in the process of researching questions of the kind, "How can I improve what I am doing and live my values as fully as I can?" "What I am doing" may be whatever it is that the practitioner is working on. The practitioner may be working to create knowledge and improve practice in a wide variety of fields or disciplines, such as mathematics, art, teaching, engineering, academia, social work or business. Irrespective of the field all people can research to understand, improve and explain their educational practice and contribute the knowledge they create to growing an educational knowledge base for the benefit of us all. Living Theory research is a form of self-study practitioner-research through which an individual accepts responsibility to hold themselves to account to live their life-affirming and life-enhancing values as fully as possible in practice and contribute the educational knowledge they generate through their research to the development of a global educational knowledge base.

Living Theory research as a way of life (Whitehead, 2018c) is focused on the idea that individual practitioner-researchers are reflexive practitioners who wish to ask, research and answer questions of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing and live my values as fully as I can?" An individual's explanations of their educational influence that emerge from such enquiries are referred to as living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 1989). The characteristics of Living Theory research as a paradigmatic approach will be explicated later in the paper in terms of living-theory methodologies and a form of educational knowledge that has emerged from such enquiries. Whilst we cannot speak for anyone else other than ourselves we are sharing our ideas about living co-operative values in the hope that they resonate with you and communicate insights that you can use in living your own values as fully as possible and in researching and sharing your explanations of educational influence, which contribute to the evolution of educational contexts and epistemologies.

Developing co-operative forms of governance is important and is being attended to internationally. For example, the University of Mondragon (Spain) is fighting to preserve its

teaching mission, industry-focused research and mutual governance model. (Matthews, 2013), the Co-operative College is supporting the development of a Co-operative University (<https://www.co-op.ac.uk/co-operative-university>) and local to us, *Towards a democratic university* for the Progressive Symposium on the Progressive Future of UK Universities on 19 April 2018 at the University of Bath, (Ridley, 2018). A further example is provided by research on student perceptions of value for money undertaken by students unions published by the Office for Students (Cook, 2018).

We notice that most attention has been given to co-operative values in relation to developing the governance of universities and generating knowledge co-operatively whilst less attention is given to the relationship between co-operative values and the higher education purpose of universities to support, generate and legitimise educational knowledge. Our desire in this paper is to address the balance of the attention paid to co-operative values in developing a Co-operative University as a business while not denying the importance of economic value.

In the rest of this paper we will focus on how living co-operative values in educational contexts is important to inform the development of a Co-operative University that supports the development and legitimisation of educational knowledge. We will begin by clarifying Living Theory research and the living-educational-theories. We will then offer an evidence-based argument to demonstrate how a Co-operative University could legitimise educational knowledge to strengthen the recognition of the importance of realising in practice personal and cultural co-operative values. We draw on and analyse narratives, such as those made public on <http://www.actionresearch.net/>, of practitioner-researchers who have been awarded their masters and doctoral degrees for their contributions to educational knowledge. These narratives with their explanations of educational influences in learning show how practitioner-researchers can go beyond the important rhetoric of espousing and articulating co-operative values. They do this by exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, “How do I improve what I am doing and live my co-operative values as fully as possible?” and contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledge base.

Living Theory Research, Living-Educational-Theories and Generating Educational Knowledge in Educational Contexts

We make a distinction between Living Theory research and a living-educational-theory. A living-educational-theory is an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that include practice and understandings. The explanatory principles include the relationally dynamic and ontological values (Huxtable, 2010) that the individual uses to give purpose to their lives and which they believe carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

By Living Theory research we mean the paradigmatic approach in which individual's generate their own living-educational-theory with the explication of their living-theory methodology and contribution to educational knowledge. In the generation of a living-theory methodology individuals can draw insights from a range of other methodological approaches such as narrative enquiry, self-study, and autoethnography (Whitehead, 2018a).

A Living Theory researcher engages creatively and critically with ideas in the related literature from a range of other theorists. No existing theory, taken individually or in any combination with other theories, can generate from the conceptual abstractions of these theories, a valid explanation that includes the embodied expressions of the meanings of the ontological and relational values that the Living Theory researcher uses as explanatory principles in the generation of their own living-educational-theory. The educational knowledge generated by Living Theory researchers is recognised as legitimise globally. The evidence we use to justify this claim can be accessed in the Living Theory doctorates from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>. Whitehead gives more detail about the distinction between Living Theory

research and a living-educational-theory and other forms of self-study and practitioner research in his recent book, *Living Theory research as a way of life* (Whitehead, 2018c).

An Evidence-Based Argument to Demonstrate how a Co-operative University could Legitimise Educational Knowledge.

Examples of educational knowledge that have been generated and awarded masters and doctoral degrees by universities in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Holland, South Africa, Australia, Canada, Nepal and Malaya can be found on <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> and at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>. You will see examples of educational knowledge generated by practitioner-researchers working and researching in diverse fields of practice. Each researcher has explained their educational influence in ways that acknowledge the importance of realising in practice, personal and cultural co-operative values.

We are starting from the assumption that the purpose of a University is essentially concerned with generating and sharing knowledge of self, other, society and cosmos, with values that that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. Whilst we are not placing economic contributions at the heart of our contribution to the creation of a Co-operative University we do engage with socio-historical and socio-cultural influences in the generation and spreading of educational knowledge. We recognise that there are economic issues that must be taken into consideration for the academic and professional legitimisation of masters and doctorates, even more so currently as universities are being forced to run as businesses rather than as a public service for the common good. Currently British universities require any person wanting to pursue higher education through a masters or doctoral programme to register for an annual fee for which the student is provided with:

- Subject knowledge in the form of access to an online and on site library comprising books and journals, and online or on site lectures and seminars.
- Skills training through workshops, lectures and online material and events such as summer schools.
- Study support via individual and group tutorials facilitated by a lecturer and supervision meetings with a lecturer.
- Support to navigate the rules and regulations of the university to successfully complete their degree.
- Examination and accreditation of their work and the award of a degree.

A student is also expected, at further expense, to broaden their cognitive range and concern by attending and presenting at academic and professional conferences, accessing material not available through the university library, and finding and taking courses the university doesn't provide.

While we recognise that fees provide an important revenue stream for many universities insisting that a student must 'buy' all the 'services' from the accrediting university can make it prohibitively expensive for many people. An added pressure is experienced by 'part-time' students, who are working on a degree while holding down a job and juggling the ever-changing demands of family, to complete within a specified time scale.

Over the years we have tutored and supervised masters and doctoral students and continued to develop our own post-doctoral higher education and professionalism by participating in diverse co-operative networks of practitioner-researchers who are prepared to contribute to and benefit from the learning of others preparing their units, dissertations, and theses for

accreditation; conference presentations; workshops; papers, and other publications. Drawing on that experience we would like here to explore with our readers a model for a Co-operative University; one that is more flexible and provides wider access to master and doctoral study for those who want to extend their higher education and professionalism and a model that embodies:

the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others (ICA, 2018).

A student would need to register with an awarding university and pay for:

- Support to navigate the rules and regulations of the university to successfully complete their degree.
- Examination and accreditation of their work and the award of a degree.

Students could chose to pay the awarding university, as they do now for:

- Subject knowledge.
- Skills training.
- Study support.

Or they could 'buy' some or all of these 'services' from other universities, professional bodies and/or access them through 'free' material and co-operative learning communities. For instance, there is now a great deal of material and massive open online courses (MOOCs) available on the web and there are many co-operative learning communities run at venues or in virtual space. Many examples can be seen on the living-poster's homepage at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage020617.pdf>.

Currently it is possible for students to complete some 'units' of professional masters and doctorates with one university and then transfer to another programme or university to complete their degree. Students on PhD programmes have also transferred university in some circumstances such as when their supervisor leaves. Other students have had support from a co-operative researching community that the university with which they are registered doesn't offer. They have also on occasions had to seek support elsewhere when their allocated supervisors do not have the field or methodological expertise. So, what is being proposed is not novel but a development of current practice.

Another example of how support for practitioner-researchers to ensure that their research meets the highest of standards of academic and scholarly work is that offered by the open review process of the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* (EJOLTs). Some 10 years ago we supported the creation of the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* with the following commitment and scope:

The *Educational Journal of Living Theories* (EJOLTS) is committed to publishing living-educational-theory (often shortened to living-theory) accounts of practitioner-researchers from a wide range of global, social, cultural, and professional contexts. We welcome submissions from all Living Educational Theory (often shortened to Living Theory) researchers who wish to contribute rigorous and valid accounts of their living-theories to improving educational knowledge.

The journal focuses on the living-theories of practitioner-researchers. Researchers generate their living-theories as their values-based "explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations" (Whitehead, 1989) in the process of researching questions such as, "How do I improve what I am doing". The values at the heart of Living Educational Theory research are the life-enhancing values that are relational and ontological, in the sense that they give meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals and groups. They are values that carry hope for the future of humanity, such as love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, care, and democracy.

We are suggesting that a Co-operative University could follow the example of the open review process established by EJOLTS to enhance the educational and academic quality of the writings of practitioner-researchers:

We are developing our open review process, which is both evaluative and educational in the process of papers being created which are of high academic and scholarly quality. It means that communication between reviewers and authors is transparent and that our readers are able to participate in the whole process. For this purpose we have established our web space of co-operation — <http://ejolts.org/> — in which you can read the suggestions of our reviewers and post your comments.

One of the main distinguishing features of our review process is the degree of openness we are encouraging in it. It is hoped that authors will have a sense of fairness and openness and reviewers will also be able to learn from the open process. The other distinguishing features are that the EJOLTS review process is both evaluative and educational.

Some of the practitioner-researcher, masters, and Living Theory doctorates legitimised at universities around the world are freely available from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>. We have offered our evidence-based argument to demonstrate how a Co-operative University could legitimise educational knowledge to strengthen the recognition of the importance of realising in practice personal and cultural co-operative values. We have done this in our analysis of the masters writings in Gifted Education International (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2016; Whitehead & Huxtable, 2013) and the doctoral degrees that are accessible from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> with additional writings from these masters and doctoral writings in EJOLTS (<http://ejolts.net/archive>).

How a Co-operative University Could Realise Co-operative Values Through Developing its Higher Education Purpose

We have shown how a Co-operative University could realise co-operative values through its governance as a Spanish university has done and as the University of Bath in England is now moving towards. In fulfilling its educational purpose we believe that one of the core principles of a Co-operative University, like all universities, should be its concern with the generation of original contributions to knowledge. The narratives of practitioner-researchers who have been awarded their Living Theory doctorates (see <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>), for their original contributions to knowledge, could provide the Co-operative University with such an original knowledge-base with a relational epistemology, similar to the one called for by Thayer-Bacon (2003):

What I offer is one pragmatist social feminist view, a relational perspective of knowing, embedded within a discussion of many other relational views. In Relational “(e)pistemologies”, I seek to offer a feminist (e)pistemological theory that insists that knowers/subjects are fallible, that our criteria are corrigible (capable of being corrected), and that our standards are socially constructed, and thus continually in need of critique and reconstruction. I offer a self-conscious and reflective (e)pistemological theory, one that attempts to be adjustable and adaptable as people gain further in understanding. This (e)pistemology must be inclusive and open to others, because of its assumption of fallible knowers. And this (e)pistemology must be capable of being corrected because of its assumption that our criteria and standards are of this world, ones we, as fallible knowers, socially construct (Thayer-Bacon, 2003: 7).

A relational (e)pistemology is supported by a relational ontology, the unifying spiritual belief that we are one with the universe. I am suggesting that the relational ontology that supports a relational (e)pistemology needs to be foregrounded as a conscious part of the curriculum, so its influence can be carefully considered and critiqued. How do we teach students that all things are interconnected and interdependent and to see themselves as jewels reflected in Indra’s net. How do we help students learn to recognise appearances that we take to be existent, separate, and permanent for what they are, delusions that cause us great suffering? There are many ways to teach a w/holistic curriculum: I do not think there is any one right way (Thayer-Bacon, 2003: 259).

What we have in mind is an epistemology for educational knowledge (Whitehead, 2018b), which offers a unit of appraisal as an individual's explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. It offers living standards of judgement as the relationally dynamic, ontological values the practitioner-researcher uses to give meaning and purpose to their lives as demonstrated by Briganti (2015). These are the values that constitute learning as educational, as they carry, in the learning, hope for the flourishing of humanity. The educational epistemology offers a living logic as a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational (Marcuse, 1964: 105).

Conclusion

In our work and research together, we characterise our relationship as “co-operative”. We understand this relationship in both the embodied sense of living our shared values in our work and research and the lexical sense of identifying with the values of the International Co-operative Alliance of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. We also seek to live as fully as possible the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.

As we believe that individual practitioner-researchers should be generating and sharing their explanations of educational influences in learning as they work and research to live values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity as fully as possible, we are doing this ourselves (Huxtable, 2012; Whitehead, 2018c).

Throughout this paper we have offered evidence-based argument to demonstrate how a Co-operative University could legitimise the educational knowledges of practitioner-researchers including those of master and doctor educators. This knowledge, in the form of living-educational-theories, includes the realising in practice of personal and cultural co-operative values.

We have pointed to and drawn on the publicly available narratives of Living Theory researchers, who have been awarded their doctoral degrees for their contributions to educational knowledge. These practitioner-researchers have gone beyond the important rhetoric of espousing and articulating co-operative values, through exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, “How do I improve what I am doing and live my values as fully as possible?” Whilst we understand the importance of governance in a Co-operative University, we have stressed the importance of fulfilling the higher education purpose of a Co-operative University in terms of the generating and sharing of educational knowledge. We have explained how such knowledge includes learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity and shared the results of our own commitments to live as fully as possible co-operative values, in the generation and sharing of educational knowledge that could help to distinguish the educational epistemology in a Co-operative University.

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