Appreciating my core values to more fully appreciate others: My living-educational-theory as a peace education researcher-practitioner

Joakim Arnøy

Joakim Arnøy

Institutions

Narvik War & Peace Centre, Narvik, Norway; Centre for Peace Studies, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway.

https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1684-5256

joakim@arnoy.org

Abstract

This article presents an inwards search for educational values at the core of my conduct and character as a peace education researcher and practitioner. To help me locate, and formulate my driving, educational values, I relate how I came to prefer non-formal education as my preferred learning format. Among the reasons is how the format encourages people to see each other, as well as the uniqueness every participant brings to the group. I bring this together to conceptualise appreciative values, by which I mean that each person's contribution is valued, and recognised for its potential power to contribute to social change in the educational setting and beyond. This concept of appreciative values is the foundation of my living-educational-theory.

To validate my improvement with regards to my values, I look to feedback forms of educational activities I have facilitated in the past. Through this, I find evidence that I have grown more into the role of an educational facilitator, and that my way of living according to appreciative values has had an influence on others I have come across. However, I also identify a gap in my demeanour, by which I act in living contradiction with my values. Acknowledging the potential for improvement, I engage in reflection with a work colleague to try to make use of that gap as a learning opportunity.

Keywords: Living Educational Theory; Peace education; Values-based inquiry; Appreciative values; Non-formal education.

Introduction

On the third day after formally starting my stipulated PhD time in 2021, I attended a mandatory course on the Philosophy of Science. The teaching professor related a story of a period as a visiting researcher some years ago at a prestigious but unidentified sociology department. While there, he would ask the faculty members what was at the core of their research practice. Much to his surprise, he said, many, if not most of them, could not come up with an answer. At the time I remember not even finding it within me to comprehend what the question really meant. But I have spent a lot of time turning that thought around in my mind. What would my reply be to that question? What is at the core of my practice as a researcher-educator?

I came into my PhD studies off the back of several years' working for a peace and human rights centre, as opposed to building from a platform within academia. I primarily worked with residence-based programmes and sessions largely founded on principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015), which would mostly fit under the umbrella of peace education (Hantzopoulos & Bajaj, 2021). My wish to pursue a PhD was motivated by two things. Firstly, to learn something for myself; and secondly, to try to add new frames of reference to the peace education conducted at my place of work, the Narvik War & Peace Centre, at which WW2 has long been a dominant guiding reference in educational work.

So, what, then, is at the core of my practice? In the process – struggle, really – to give relatable direction to my own PhD research, I find that I have at least and at last, found meaning as to what the core of my research could be. My attention was caught by Living Educational Theory Research, with its focus on inquiring into one's own core values as drivers of one's own practice (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2021). I have found it a constructive tool to explore and to use to write about what inspires and motivates me and thereby fuels my practice.

This article narrates my search for my own living-educational-theory as a peace educator. It follows the overall outline of:

- trying first to home in on the values that explain the orientation of my practice and how I conduct this practice;

- accounting for my practice as the one in which I aim to achieve improvement, within my dual role as a researcher-practitioner of non-formal peace education;

- bringing that field of practice together with Living Educational Theory Research to identify an area ripe for interaction (noting that peace education literature is full of introspection and positionality accounts);

- diving into my own driving, educational values, narrated *via* my coming to understand and explore non-formal education, and later peace education.

- identifying a number of claims, which I then set out to substantiate by dipping into testimonies of former participants in my international, residential, non-formal training activities, to see if I live according to my educational values in such settings.

- using this exploration to realise that there is a behavioural gap in how I live those same values at my regular place of work, meaning I am, in part, a living contradiction.

–   attempting to address that gap of contradiction and offering parts of a validating conversation to arrive at some concluding implications as to my living-educational-theory.

Non-formal Peace Education: My Field of Practice

In a seminal contribution to peace education scholarship, Gavriel Salomon (2002) asks, "Is there a common core to all the different varieties of peace education or is it no more than a loose collection of programs which differ from each other in important ways?" (p.4). In what must be read as a tentative no to his own question, Salomon goes on to clarify that peace education takes place in widely different contexts, meaning that the goals and approaches of programmes must also be distinct. Another critical observation that can be attached to the core of peace education (assuming that it has a core) comes from James Page (2004), who proposes that, "There is no well-developed philosophical rationale for peace education, other than perhaps a general deontological notion that peace education is something to which humanity ought to be committed" (Page, 2004, p. 5).

Viewing the latter proposition in light of the former, there is a possible pitfall at our feet. Going down a route without a clear rationale, carrying out a practice without leaning into relatable theory of what we are doing, we risk proceeding essentially 'core-less'. That means: are we doing things because we feel we should, or are we doing them because there is a need and a vision involved? In that formulation there is also a question for the individual who is planning and implementing peace education activities. That is the focal point of the question this article will seek to answer.

Definitionally speaking, peace education revolves around activities that empower those involved to redress circumstances that lead to one or more forms of violence (Harris, 2002), with violence often referring to direct, structural, and cultural forms (Galtung, 1969, 1990). This means that peace education can manifest in a wide range of ways. It is seldom a separate subject, but rather infused into curricula by way of competence-building attentions and methods. But many warn that it must be connected to the real world, and not limited to a classroom or other learning venue (Bar-Tal, 2002; Harris, 2002; Shapiro, 2010). Shapiro further holds that, "... our goals in education must be rooted in an overarching vision of the good society and valued human behaviour" (Shapiro, 2010, p. 17). In other words, the vision must be one that lives alongside the challenges it aims to address.

My form of peace education has largely been built on a platform of youth work. This is a format that takes place outside of the formal education sector, but also has an explicit goal of generating learning. Such non-formal education (NFE) draws on formal education, with its formal structure, pre-planning, and clearly directed approach to learning. But it also takes a leaf from informal learning, which can be loosely equated to everyday experiences that inspire learning. NFE then, is semi-structured, voluntary, interactive, and participant-centred. Engaging head, heart, and hands, it is construed as a holistic form of learning (Brander et al., 2020).

More concretely in my case, much of it has been residential training courses, seminars, and youth exchanges, consisting of multiple activity sessions extended across several days. In addition, there are the more frequent, but one-off, activities with school classes and other groups visiting my organisation's venue. Topic-wise, I have worked the

most with human rights education, democracy education, and conflict management, much of which concerns creativity and dialogue competence. Each programme or activity has been tailored for the occasion, depending on target group, objectives of the organiser, or pressing current events.

Adding research to this hands-on and applied practice begets a deep reflective stage, much the same way the Kolb-cycle of experiential learning prescribes (Kolb, 2015). I have found that combining reflection, as in the research, with the action of preparing education sessions, results in a praxis. The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire's influential book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) includes *praxis* as a crucial term. This publication is a key text that has significantly informed peace education, particularly types that aim to address structural forms of violence. Freire, however, in his quest to write from the viewpoint of oppressed peoples, warns that it is a *praxis* only if action is supported – fuelled, even – by critical reflection that stems from action, and that this, in turn, drives further action. To achieve this outcome, one must be sensitive to the realities of struggling people, and be *with* them in "co-intentional education" (Freire, 1970, p. 43), meaning that each individual is recognised as both teacher and learner at the same time.

In summary, I consider my practice as one that embraces a non-binary combination of education and research in peace education. What's more, I hold the research component of my work and the education part to be a unity (i.e. non-binary), each informing the other.

Anchoring My living-educational-theory in Peace Education

A living-educational-theory is, "… an explanation produced by an individual of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work" (Whitehead, 2008, p. 104). To develop a living-educational-theory, an educational practitioner researches their own practice, with its educational influences, to obtain a better understanding of it, all the while attempting to improve the practice (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2021).

Branch (2022) highlights the emphasis on educational values. An educational practitioner who operates separately from their values ends up being a living contradiction, with discrepancies between stated values and lived values (Delong & Whitehead, 2024). Instead, educational values are to be embraced as part of the professional identity of the educational practitioner. Educational values are embodied by the way an educator practices their trade (Branch, 2022, p. 3). This perspective connects with the way we speak about behaviour in the NFE settings of European youth work, which have had such an influence on me. As Evrard and Bergstein (2023) describe, attitudes drive the search for knowledge, which we actively apply through skills, while all of this is embodied through behaviour. For an individual's living-educational-theory, educational values are held up as the main explanatory principles and the standards of judgement in the improvement of that practice (Delong & Whitehead, 2024).

There are various ways to go about this inquiry. Branch (2022) leans into autoethnography to identify his educational values. Drawing on a previously written account of important, developmental events, as well as his own reflections on the meanings of these events, he arrived at a set of descriptive codes that offered his interpretation of values in

what he had written. A more common approach is offered by Vaughan (2019), who had a fairly clear idea of what her core value was when she started her inquiry. She states that she was helped further along by asking *who* had been influential to her becoming a teacher, as opposed to *what*.

Peace education lends itself freely to being both researcher and practitioner. But particularly on the research side there is an ongoing positionality 'turn', with reflexivity around one's positionality being integral. Accounting for who we are, with background, emotions, values, blind spots, to name a few aspects, is a matter of some urgency when producing theory in peace education. I take a lot of inspiration from the autoethnographic account presented by Cremin (2018), in which she aims to:

> ..recall events that have strong emotional meaning for me in order to add layers to my analysis, and to influence change in a field that is in need of fresh approaches. I hope that the affective dimension will resonate with the ideas that excite me in my reading and reflections on research in my field. I hope that these resonances will create amplifications and spaces for my readers that would not otherwise be possible. I wish to expose my own vulnerability, as a peace educator, as a partner, and as an academic, so that my readers will be encouraged to lift the veils that perhaps obscure their own vulnerability (Cremin, 2018, p. 3).

Cremin speaks of affect. She speaks of vulnerability. She speaks of bringing her full self into her practice, thereby also making it safer for readers and others who engage in her practice to bring their full selves too. Feeling this vulnerability when I was due to take part in my first academic conference on peace education, I researched the methodology preferences of several of the participants. I find that such framings of research often tell me something about who people are, and how they think. Some of these included narrative accounts of background (Kester, 2020), candid descriptions of formative experiences from intercultural encounters (Brantmeier & Brantmeier, 2020), and reflections on adaptations made to peace education practice as the classroom pushes back (Gittins, 2020). During the conference[1], it was striking how many of the participants, which included some of the leading scholars in the field, started their contributions by positioning themselves with candour. I was particularly struck by my first conversation partner, Primitivo Ragandang, who elaborated that his research question had been rejected by his doctoral committee an extraordinary 17 times before they would allow him to proceed. (The committee said he was still too stuck in the practice field, not yet rooted enough in academic standards - see Ragandang, 2022 for a written account). He openly, and without shame or regret, brought his full self to the table. Kevin Kester, Michalinos Zembylas and Edward Brantmeier cite their participation in this conference, and praise the contributions of reflective inwards-gazing to theorise further on both limitations and opportunities in their practice (Kester *et al*., 2023). Having found such a spirit of self-exploration and explicit appreciation of the learning journey, I have also been inspired to engage in this as an aspect of my academic work.

---

[1] Georg Arnhold (2022) International Summer Conference (GAISC) in Braunschweig, Germany in 2022, titled 'Decolonizing Peace Education: Problematizing Colonial Power Dynamics, Knowledge Production, and Ways of Knowing'.

I have written before, partly autoethnographically, about one facet of my practice, primarily the educative one, that stands on a foundation of European youth work (see Arnøy, 2023). That account also contained an analysis and critique of parts of the value base of the funding scheme I have relied on for much of the work. However, I find that Living Educational Theory Research (LETR) adds something constructive to that line of inquiry, because it homes in on the value-base of the practitioner (Whitehead, 1989). Positionality statements achieve something similar, as they almost inevitably reveal something about the motivation of the researcher, and what kind of voice the researcher brings to a line of inquiry. Another GAISC-participant, Hakim Williams, has spoken about how his background contributed to his connection to a set of theories that provided him with a sense of analytics as well as the right language with which to proceed as a researcher[2]. He connected this to the need to "bring yourself along" in your research. This goes beyond positionality statements, and is already some way towards centring one's research practice around values, which speaks to identity. There is also an element of subjectivity in that approach.

Church's PhD thesis (2015) is centred around the question, "... what constitutes identity as a peace educator?" (Church, 2015, p. 2). By interviewing practitioners in various educational arenas, she runs into a whole discourse on identity, as none of her interviewees actually pin the peace educator-label to themselves. Instead, she reflects back to doing as the be-all of a practice (Church, 2015). You are a 'peace educator' if you conduct peace education. But the label might feel restraining because you can also be many other things.

The educational programmes I have been involved in implementing, as described in the previous section, have mostly dealt with various forms of peace education. But there are exceptions. This observation, although seemingly minor, is relevant. I have enjoyed those processes too, although they have not been centred around that selection of topics which most intrigue me. Perhaps it is indeed the term 'educator' that weighs the most in that word pairing 'peace educator'. I have settled on this particular observation as a springboard to formulate my living-educational-theory.

My Driving, Educational Values

Just to be clear at this point: my practice is one of peace education and research. As a *praxis*, the application of education fuels the research, and vice versa. But as a basic definition, peace education can be understood as one of the many ways of working to improve our ways of interacting with each other. The action part of peace education, for me, takes place in non-formal settings, drawing on principles of experiential learning (Brander *et al.*, 2020), primarily implemented with and for blended, international groups of participants, working together for several days. For the reflection part, research is the cornerstone. Stated briefly and once again, my practice of peace education is one of researcher-practitioner, which I consider to be a perfectly unifiable set of approaches.

Identifying my driving values as a peace educator, I need to trace back to the point when I first realised that I wanted to be an educator, with the research coming later as a

[2] Presented in a guest lecture at UiT Arctic University of Norway, called 'De-colonial peace education: Activism through teaching and research', held 20.9.2023.

result of that. Getting to know NFE, as I know it from European youth work, was an epiphany for me. Participating in my first couple of residential training events in 2013–2014, I got to know an interactive and engaging form of facilitating learning and reflection. I had fun with it, first and foremost. There was even something profound in something as basic and simple as being seated in a circle, symbolising our equal worth and standing in the setting, everybody seeing everybody, and being seen by everybody, equally. I felt seen, even without having to try to be. You can be the most active voice there, or you can hide in plain sight and save your views for later.

Brainstorming exercises were mixed with discussion groups, role play activities, and various ways of stimulating people into a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), such as game-based learning exercises (I have written about the development of one such activity, Mission Z, in Arnøy, 2019). This format of learning required me to use head, heart, and hands, which means thinking, feeling, and moving. I felt an impact on myself from this type of learning experience that was being put on show for me and my fellow participants, which made me think that if it could impact me in this way, it could impact other people too. I wanted to be a multiplier of the inspiration I felt. This will be one side of the values coin I will present below.

Coming to NFE in this way, I discovered that learning is a way of being for me. I consider it a way of uniting my take on epistemology, the philosophy of coming to know, and ontology, the philosophy of being. In that dialogue with other learners, I find my way of knowing and my way of being. They connect for me, and the composite way becomes the goal. However, there is something else here too, which refers back to the observation I offered in the previous section, in which I wondered if the educator-part weighs more than the peace-part. If I seem to enjoy the methodological aspects of conceptualising, ideating, planning, preparing, implementing, and evaluating educational programmes, despite the topics of content not being my favoured ones, what does that say about my values?

First of all, I want to bring in a couple of sources on values, to scaffold my ideas about my educational values. The Council of Europe's (CoE) manual *Competence for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2016) describes values as "... desirable goals that should be striven for in life" (p. 36). Furthermore, values are one of the four constituents that make up competences, along with skills, attitudes, and knowledge and critical understanding. Viewing values in this way aligns with Crompton's (2022) description of intrinsic values. Crompton (2022) defines values "... to mean the guiding principles we hold and which help to shape our attitudes and behaviours" (n.p.). Values transcend specificity, and are part of an individual's sense of self. Crompton then splits the term into 'intrinsic values', being the more selfless ones more oriented towards the benefit of society, and 'extrinsic values', being the ones more directed towards the self, which include popularity, status, and recognition.

Reflecting upon what NFE means to me, and why it means something to me, I recognise that my driving values are fuelled by both the intrinsic side and the extrinsic side. Just being in a forum, such as the ones we create when conducting NFE activities in the way I know them, means that we, the people present, are encouraged to help ourselves and each other to learn and reflect. It inspires – certainly in me – an impetus to be curious, helpful, and broadminded, which are some of Crompton's (2022) selection of intrinsic values, and ones I recognise as my own. Self-reflective study on my own practice with a critical lens, also regarding positionality, which I write about in Arnøy (2023), has helped me realise that I hold

a golden ticket in many walks of life, such as material standards, security, and opportunity. This type of perspective opener has driven me to motivate and encourage others to also inspect and widen their perspectives to be curious, broadminded, and helpful in the learning setting.

My extrinsic values have come about in a somewhat tense relation to the intrinsic values. One of the dominant ones finds its place in the domain of power, namely social recognition (Crompton, 2022). Both as an educator and as an academic, I have had my struggles with imposter syndrome, in the meaning that there is that part of me that is always just waiting to *be found out* – that I am not really cut out for this, and not good enough. Some of this likely stem from the society or societies in which I have mostly spent my life so far. It is relational, and materialises when I am looking to find my way in life. One concrete example I can offer relates to my place of study for my masters, at USIU-Africa in Kenya. The fact that my degree was obtained in Africa regularly invites questions about the quality of learning I have gone through at that level. In terms of what my two years there meant to me, I am on very steady ground. I completed a degree, but also learned more about myself than I think I would studying closer to home. However, oriented towards social recognition, such questions – even the implicit ones – register with me as a lack of recognition for my path, particularly when I sense it as a comparison to more prestigious institutions in Europe or North America.

There is inevitably an element of ego baked into this, pining for recognition. But I have also come to realise and accept that there is another side of this particular coin, to which I alluded above, namely, to actively recognise others' need for recognition as well. I see a sort of symbiosis between recognition and appreciation, and I have come to understand this partly *via* conversation with a critical friend, Tony Ghaye, with his approach of appreciative action and reflection (see Ghaye *et al.*, 2008 for more on this approach). Embrace what we bring into view and play on its strengths, instead of delineating deficits. Seek out the good and amplify it. His mentorship has been formative for my values search.

Varona (2024, p. 71) considers appreciative values as touching the emotional, the rational, and the operative spectrum of people. Varona moves on to concretise what appreciative values are, with examples. He presents a framework of five values that have been around since the inception of the methodology of appreciative inquiry, and another five values that are, by now, also established in that same approach to research.

The five original, appreciative values are:

1. The social construction of reality, meaning to embrace, and act according to our own subjective interpretation of reality
2. The creative value of human beings, meaning to believe in our power to create
3. Simultaneity of social change and intervention, meaning that change is being promoted from the moment an intervention is initiated
4. Anticipation of the future we want to create, meaning that visualisation has a positive effect on the outcome
5. Positive approach and questioning, meaning that questions guide our thinking and actions (Varona, 2024, pp. 74-75).

In light of these, I find that I can stand relatively tall, and adopt them as part of my framework of appreciative values that drive me.

Held up against the subsequent five appreciative values Varona lists, my record is a bit more chequered. I will dive into those living contradictions that this realisation presents later in this article. These five appreciative values are:

1. Inclusiveness and synergy, entailing inclusion of all members to promote participation and ownership
2. The power of example, meaning to act as we wish to see others act
3. Freedom of choice, meaning that we choose our own ways of contributing to the co-creation of the future we want to see emerge
4. Being aware of our assumptions and reactions, which means engaging in cycles of action and reflection
5. The narrative value of sharing stories, which is the belief that stories are inspiring, and communicate our values, standards, and traditions (Varona, 2024, pp. 76-77).

Overall, Varona (2024) defines appreciative values as:

... those [values] that inspire, support and guide our ontological view of human beings and the social and natural world in which we live; epistemological practice, that is, how we conduct research, the methodology for social change, and the way we talk about human beings and the social and natural world in which we live. (p. 72)

I find merit in using the term 'appreciative values' as a hold-all term for my educational values, based, as they are, on insights from both Varona (2024) and Ghaye *et al.* (2008). A summary, then, of what I consider *my* appreciative values, applied in my practice, is that I regard all people's contributions, including my own, in an NFE forum as valid and valuable, with their subjectiveness and contributing power to social change, and that they should be embraced and included for their courage and potential to stimulate learning potential and synergies. My aforementioned intrinsic values also readily fit into this summary, because I find that there is ample room to reconcile them with the more selfish extrinsic value part of me because of the settings in which I live and work.

This summary contains the explanatory principles of my living-educational-theory, and subsequently form the evaluative standard to which I hold myself within my practice of peace education.

The Influence of My Educational Values on Myself and Others

Educational values, including appreciative values, influence oneself first, before others can be revealed. As part of the writing of this article, and forming my living-educational-theory, I have sat for several mentoring sessions with Jackie Delong and Jack Whitehead. During one of these sessions they uniformly countered my expressed doubts about my research efforts having an influence on fellow peace educators. Jack pointed out that my own descriptions of my practice, coupled with what I arrive at as my educational values, will be a literal new contribution to the field, with the merits it has (personal communication 10.6.2024). Jackie added jokingly "I think we need to give you some assertiveness training", and followed up with "I think you need to have more faith in your

knowledge and your understanding and your capacity to theorise" (personal communication 10.6.2024).

When we next met a few months later, I had written most of the text above and shared with Jack and Jackie. Our conversation of 2.9.2024 opened with me accounting for what had changed in my overall research thinking since we last talked. I referred to their wish for more belief in my original contributions to my field, and added that my work, trying to formulate my own living-educational-theory, being this article, has helped me along – perhaps not to its conclusion, but even towards a structure for my PhD thesis that can, simultaneously, bind together, narratively, the separate articles of my collection, whilst also to present an original contribution.

Jackie acknowledged that I spoke with far more authority in my writing now, which she considered a necessary trait. Later in the conversation she expressed, "I think I'm hearing the influence on yourself, but we want to talk about the influence on others". She called on me to look for evidence of my influence on others I have come across in my practice: "Where did you see people working towards the kind of direction that you want them to go in peace education?" (personal communication 2.9.2024). This is a challenging request, but one I can understand. In such an introspective article, the influence of the value set I propose is sure to be more visible on myself – not least seeing as that is what I am attempting to show in the article. But in what ways do my arrived-at educational values influence others in a constructive fashion?

Knowingly or unknowingly, Jackie poked at one of the big, longstanding gaps within peace education, namely its impact evaluation. As Del Felice *et al*. (2015) introduce in their edited volume on peace education evaluation, there appears to be a lack in both available tools and capability to evaluate properly the activities implemented, and that observable changes often are but skin-deep. One of the conceptual proposals of evaluation comes from Yazdanpanah (2015). Taking onboard Reardon's notion of *edu-learning* (1988), which elevates the mutual responsibility for knowledge creation of all involved, Yazdanpanah holds up peace education as being evaluation in and by itself. Being an open-ended process of discovery, "peace education itself is a constant evaluation of individual and communal well-being" (Yazdanpanah, 2015, p. 276). She argues that it is far less about reaching set goals, than it is about an ongoing journey of discovery of what enriches life and its qualities, which are different depending on the perspective or angle taken.

For me, then, looking to pinpoint the influence of my educational values on other people I have encountered in my practice, I made a point of consulting evaluation forms of training events of the past to see if someone may have said something that, in some form, refers to life qualities being elevated as a part-outcome of my appreciative values, as I formulated them in the previous section. Some of these forms asked for direct feedback either to each individual trainer, and others to the team as a whole. I shall now offer a selection of such evaluation forms to substantiate the claims I make about my values-based approach.

Sharing snippets of such feedback is an uncomfortable act, because some of the words cited are about my person and performance. Leading training courses of experiential learning necessitates the important part-aim of stimulating and assisting participants into going beyond their comfort zone into the learning zone – or what Vygotsky calls "the zone of

proximal development", meaning what someone can do when aided by someone else (Daniels, 2016). In this model, the facilitator is part of that hold-all term *scaffolding*, which teases the person into the realm where reflection takes place. I am used to, and embrace the pedagogy of vulnerability that comes through in experiential learning (McKenna & Brantmeier, 2020). However, writing about concrete feedback and sharing it for a reading audience feels like a different beast entirely, and brings me to the very edge of my learning zone.

I start off with the first multi-day, international training activity about conflict management in which I was a leading facilitator, in Portugal in 2016. The feedback given to my efforts and role were generally favourable. But there are a few that show clearly that I was very much learning the trade, with one participant saying, "It seems to me he doesn't want to go deep in the topics, like he was fearing something ... fear to fail?". Another one added, "It seems to me he is a bit afraid of confrontation". Looking back at these comments, it appears to me that I may have stuck more to the script, exhibiting less inclination to embrace the ambiguity of process. One participant of that same activity said, "I felt like we had a good teacher-student relationship". I believe this last comment was intended as a positive one. However, the notion of student-teacher relation does not work well for me in the applied practice of non-formal peace education, as I partly root appreciative values in the removal of hierarchy in learning situations, as prescribed by Freire (1970). I would rather aim to slot in as a fellow edu-learner with shared responsibility to create learning both for myself and the rest of the group (Reardon, 1988).

Moving forward, in time, I believe there is a slightly different flavour to the participants' feedback, in that those questions of my motivation to really 'dig in' seem to become more infrequent. After another international training course on conflict management that I facilitated in Poland in 2017, one participant wrote in their evaluation, "Joakim carefully listens to the opinions of others", with another adding, "After every activity he discusses and then explains the meaning or purpose of the activities. He makes sure we get the most out of our participation in a session by trying to understand our own behaviour and the behaviour of others." Yet another wrote, "The way of presenting the contents was really clear and understandable. I also much appreciate your attentive and respectful listening". From this, it seems applied appreciation has got more of a foothold, with my attempts at fully appreciating what the participants bring, is also being appreciated by the participants.

I find further evidence of my being interested in participants' well-being in the evaluations of another international training course, also in 2017. This activity was hosted partly at the facilities of my employer in Norway, meaning I doubled up as facilitator as well as contact point for logistics and general wellbeing. One participant commented during evaluation:

> I never had a fear to approach Joakim. He is very helpful guy and whenever I had an issue I was approaching him being sure that he is always looking for the solution and help. Friendly, honest and professional.

Applied appreciation also works inwards, as directed to the teamwork of involved trainers or facilitators. Most often, we ask for, and receive joint feedback. One participant of a peace education training course in Norway in 2018 thanked the team with the words,

"That you 'breathe the same', respect each other and are really talented". Another complimented the team saying that we showcased, "Mutual support, humour, just being themselves, their diversity, attitude towards life, work and world, soft skills". I find this to indicate that I, at this stage, have come to accept *myself* more in my role as a trainer and facilitator, and that I began to embrace a pedagogy of vulnerability more, as I increasingly opened up for participants to also get to know me and my driving values, much in line with the vulnerability in facilitation Koppensteiner (2020) elaborates as adding to the professionalism as opposed to subtracting from it.

One particularly testing activity took place in Belgium in March 2020, in the very week restrictions on travel started hitting due to Covid-19. As I too shared my apprehension about not making it easily back home to my family, space was opened for the entire group to support each other during a few days, which, without a doubt, instilled in us a collective anxiety. As written feedback, one participant expressed to my co-facilitator and me:

> Thank you both very much for everything. You did a great work [*sic*], I can tell that you spent a lot of time to prepare this. You are very positive and caring. A special thank [*sic*] because of the situation, I had the feeling that in any case you were there for us and that made me feel secure and relaxed.

I find evidence in such testimonies and feedback that in settings of residential training courses, I live up to my evaluative standards, in the shape of my stated, appreciative values. I have gone in with my full self, subjectivity, and courage to lean into views as potentially perspective-widening, and that I give my full attention to people to express their views. It is also a form of appreciation to have realised that I flourish both in the setting of NFE and also within topics other than my preferred ones, wanting, above all, to be a multiplier of affective, educational activities, I appreciate that this is my place to exert my full self. Being appreciative of my self means I am fully primed to also be appreciative of other participants of that forum. Returning to the circle arrangement that so often is a mainstay in NFE activities, it carries a symbolism of recognition of everyone, for what they bring into the group. Plying one's trade in that setting provides ample room to appreciate what each contributor brings into the fray, as well as appreciating that we all take away different nuggets of learning, and reflect differently on what we are exposed to.

However, there is a gap, which I can quite easily pinpoint: context, more specifically with regards to *who* and *where*. At my regular place of work, I have not come close to living those values as fully. While I feel that I can lead by example during shorter sessions with groups and participants I normally do not know at all before starting, there is a blocker preventing me from living accordingly at my regular place of work. This gap can be thought of as me being a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2019), with room for improvement. I now focus on that gap.

Minding the Gap of Living Contradiction

Living Educational Theory research is an approach undertaken by a practitioner with the explicit aim to better understand and improve on one's practice. Employing this approach also has the potential to enhance my educational influence on the learning and social formation of people who inhabit the same, or similar, spaces of learning. Further,

going public with such an account, with its originality, contributes to the global knowledge base of education. Part of such an undertaking is to uncover possible tensions between expressed values and the actual iteration of these values: to test whether and where you are a living contradiction (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2021). As part of my improvement aim and journey, this section aims to bring the extrinsic and intrinsic values into closer contact, all the time laced with the connector value of appreciation.

If I go back to when the idea of formulating my own living-educational-theory first came about, in the autumn of 2023, I find some contradictions. Working for a relatively small organisation, I have certainly been guilty of thinking at times that "I know best" for various topics, meaning I have not lived up to the inclusiveness-value. I have found this much harder to live up to at my place of regular work than in project groups for international training activities. I take this to mean it matters who is in the room, and that there are some personas that act as blockers for me. I believe this obstruction has carried forward to make me less attuned to a couple of the other appreciative values, such as the power of example. It has not come naturally to me frequently enough in my organisation, meaning that I have more often mirrored behaviours I have perceived as being less wanted, instead of setting my own example in an appreciative fashion.

Nonetheless, one key development within the organisation provided me with a forum more suited to my *way of being* internally at my workplace, as I was asked by the director to facilitate a series of internal strategy seminars in 2024, together with a colleague. Agreeing to capitalise on this opportunity, we also aimed to increase the staff's awareness and competencies, with dialogue, appreciation, and agency being the concepts on which we based our programme. Consequently, I felt a renewed inspiration to contribute inwards that has been lacking for quite some time and, furthermore, this task has been an opportunity to test myself, and try to align my claimed driving values with how I *live* them.

To help validate my working attempt to address this contradiction in my value-framework, I engaged in a recorded reflective conversation with the colleague with whom I facilitated the four-part internal seminar[3], Camilla Davidsen[4]. This, of course, was in addition to numerous reflective conversations we had during those months about the process, our collective performance as an organisation, tensions, and developments. Camilla was presented with my draft article, and a set of questions around which our conversation revolved. These questions were:

1. Is there evidence of development in the implementation of my practice?
2. Is there evidence that I have become more conscious of my core values?
3. Is there evidence that I have lived in adherence to these values?
4. Is there evidence that my own learning, and how I have used my learning by way of practice, has influenced others?

---

[3] 3 full-day seminars with the staff in April, May, and August, with another full-day seminar for the board of trustees in September.

[4] The recorded conversation took place on 17.9.2024. It was in Norwegian, and so is the transcription. All translations are my own.

I submit parts of my conversation with Camilla as being both formative and summative instalments of validation, as Whitehead has encouraged me to do (personal communication 2.9.2024).

Camilla and I had been colleagues for less than a year when we were brought together as a team to facilitate this internal process. This means that she only came to know my previous educational journey via my narrative. For that reason, we agreed at the outset of our conversation, that the initial brainstorming phase of the internal strategy process would serve as the starting point for our conversation, despite her recognising the importance of my previous journey, and that self-improvement is hard to pin down to a zero point. Early on, she posed the following question:

> In the seminars, we have talked about the organisation's values. But we have also talked about some key concepts, which also have a values-based foundation, with dialogue competence, recognition, and sustainable agency. Those concepts, too, come from a place. And so, your writing also contains your hunt for your values, and how they contribute both to defining you, and that you are defined by them, in a sense. That there is a mutual influence of being conscious of your core values, and having some as goals. You speak about an overlap between being who you are and who you would like to be. Where do you see these values belonging then? Where would you place them in this two-way split? Are they a part of you, or are they a part of who you would like to be, or are they part of both? (Davidsen, C., personal communication 17.9.2024)

In response, I elaborated how I have been of two minds about this, depending largely on place, context, cooperation partners, and activity i.e. the aforementioned gap between how I have been and acted in my international project groups, and how I have been and acted inside of the organisation's walls. I then summarised my response as follows.

> All in all, the gap between behaving, and trying to live according to the value of inclusion, which I have felt so pressingly at times; that is, in collaboration with international project colleagues, and that type of setting, and what I have experienced and lived according to here, it has diminished a bit. And that is a very good feeling. I had not at all thought I would get to experience that, really. I had given up on that years ago. But it has started to spring to life. And that feels good. (personal communication 17.9.2024)

To which Camilla responded:

> That's good to hear. And I think that you are on to something, which I have observed, and which I have experienced through conversations with you, and which I locate in some of your writing. It is about duality. You highlight appreciation as an overarching value, and then you mention broadminded, curious, helpful, as categories below that. I think these values connect to the identity you have experienced for yourself outside of these walls. And then you have pointed out that there are some differences here that regards the situation, relations, and other parameters concerning the two identities you have sketched out. I think it is interesting and exciting to look at this, these tensions, as you talk about both in the text and now. And I also think that in these areas of tension, in this discrepancy, this cognitive dissonance, sometimes, there is something valuable. Right? There is something there worth listening to, and try to uncover. (Davidsen, C., personal communication 17.9.2024).

In our conversation, there is a clear recognition of that exploration of the contradictory gap, and the learning potential therein. We talk about it in more depth, and at one point arrive at the frustrations expressed by another of our colleagues during the process with internal seminars, to which I can relate some of my points of dissonance at the workplace. The conversation further shows my growing appreciation for this colleague's situation, and a keenness to alleviate it. As Camilla expressed:

> You now see that expressed need in someone else, which you once had yourself. And living educational theory, as I understand it, is about that self-examination, but also for something bigger, something outside of oneself. So, that journey you have had 5-6-7 years back, you now see in someone else. But you also see, I think, a way of influencing that. And I think that in that testimony, we must recognise that a development has taken place. Your perspective, your point of view, but also in that experience which you have garnered, from being frustrated, to now perhaps seeing how you can push that in a better direction. But you would perhaps not have come to this point without going through those steps yourself. (Davidsen, C., personal communication 17.9.2024)

This section has been constructed in this format for two main purposes: first, to look for improvement in that gap of living contradiction; and second, to validate, also summatively, my living-educational-theory, driven as it is by the framing value of appreciation. I find evidence in my demeanour, and its evolution, in Camilla's responses, some of which are on record above. But, as a result of being jointly engaged in an improvement process for the whole organisation we work for, we saw potential for capitalising on this conversation (as we have done from many others like it, though unrecorded) for the benefit of the whole organisation. I will end this section with yet another pithy paragraph of Camilla's, which goes some way towards validating that there is something in my exploration and approach that has rubbed off on her.

> There is especially one experience you have shared with me that has made an impression. It was about how you had been away, working on a project activity, which had left you with a good feeling. You know, that feeling almost of euphoria after completing a big task. Then you come back here with that positive feeling in your body. And then no one asks you how it went. And so, that experience made an impression on me. Both with regards to understanding you better, but also to recognise how important it is to take such small wins seriously. Something that can seem miniscule to me, might be a big win for a colleague. And we must never forget that. (Davidsen, C., personal communication 17.9.2024)

The Way Forward – a Kind of Conclusion

Jack Whitehead has emphasised – repeatedly – that the contribution of my writing about this exact topic is distinctly original. The pages above are written with my own epistemological spectacles firmly seated on the bridge of my nose. I have made several claims about myself, connected to my field of practice, attempted to show some evidence of chronological improvement, and engaged with a gap that has been tantamount to being a living contradiction. So, what does that make of my living-educational-theory? I both appreciate, and try to appreciate.

I also observe in myself that I project of my appreciative values more effectively when similar affects are also reflected back to me from other people. The realisation that my

driving educational values may be more accentuated when they are mirrored around to me as well, is one that carries a number of significant possible implications. One is that it may be easier to function educationally in a chamber of the likeminded, as opposed to dissenters, which is a thought I will keep stabbing away at in subsequent research. Another regards the potential for falling away from my driving values, and moving forward as a living contradiction, which I have discussed above. I judge, from the reception of this process by my colleague, Camilla, that the onus is on me to initiate that iterative cycle of appreciative values in places that I feel are initially less responsive, so that the setting may become more conducive as a direct result of it.

Koppensteiner (2020, p. 103), writing about embracing his own vulnerability, points the way for reaching inwards by quoting Leonard Cohen's lyrics from *Anthem* (1992): "There is a crack, a crack in everything – that's how the light gets in". I extend that image to anyone who is considering an introspective approach to a self-improvement of educational practice, such as Living Educational Theory Research, to make that first step.

References

Arnøy, J. (2019). Simulating War Dynamics: A Case Study of the Game-Based Learning Exercise Mission Z: One Last Chance. In P. Hammond & H. Pötzsch (Eds.), *War Games: Memory, Militarism and the Subject of Play* (pp. 223-239). Bloomsbury Academic & Professional. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tromsoub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5986870

Arnøy, J. (2023). Non-formal peace education founded on European youth work: A practitioner's critical reflection. *Peace and change*, *48*(4), 281-297. https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12630

Bar-Tal, D. (2002). The elusive nature of peace education. In G. Salomon & B. Nevo (Eds.), *Peace Education : The Concept, Principles, and Practices Around the World* (pp. 27-36). Taylor & Francis Group. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tromsoub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=227509

Branch, J., D. . (2022). An autoethnography of my educational values. *Educational journal of living theories*, *15*(1), 1-25. https://web-cdn.org/s/1445/file/node/15-1.pdf

Brander, P., De Witte, L., Ghanea, N., Gomes, R., Keen, E., Nikitina, A. K., Pinkeviciute, J., Juhász, V., & Schneider, A. (2020). *Compass: A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People*. Council of Europe. https://books.google.pl/books?id=cXE8zgEACAAJ

Brantmeier, E. J., & Brantmeier, N. K. (2020). *Culturally Competent Engagement: A Mindful Approach*. Information Age Publishing.

Church, M. R. (2015). *Teaching peace: An exploration of identity development of peace educators* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Council of Europe. (2016). *Competences for democratic culture: living together as equals in culturally diverse democracies*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Cremin, H. (2018). An autoethnography of a peace educator: Deepening reflections on research, practice and the field. *Emotion, space and society*, *28*, 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.05.001

Crompton, T. (2022). *Healing division through exploration of shared values*. Retrieved 15.7.2024 from https://belonging.berkeley.edu/democracy-belonging-forum/papers/healing-divison

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. HarperPerennial.

Daniels, H. (2016). *Vygotski and Pedagogy*. Routledge.

Del Felice, C., Karako, A., & Wisler, A. (2015). Introduction. In C. Del Felice, A. Karako, & A. Wisler (Eds.), *Peace Education Evaluation: Learning from Experience and Exploring Prospects* (pp. xv-xxii). Information Age Publishing Inc.

Delong, J., & Whitehead, J. (2024). *You and Your Living-Educational Theory: How to conduct a values-based inquiry for human flourishing* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003369158

Evrard, G., & Bergstein, R. (2023). *YOCOMO: A Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally*. https://www.flipsnack.com/saltotrainingandcooperation/ets-competence-model-for-youth-workers.html

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New rev. ed.). Penguin.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of peace research*, *6*(3), 167-191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of peace research*, *27*(3), 291-305. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005

Ghaye, T., Melander-Wikman, A., Kisare, M., Chambers, P., Bergmark, U., Kostenius, C., & Lillyman, S. (2008). Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) - democratizing reflective practices. *Reflective practice*, *9*(4), 361-397. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940802475827

Gittins, P. (2020). Being Vulnerable in the Classroom: Presence, Power, and Pushback in Peace Education. In E. J. Brantmeier & M. K. McKenna (Eds.), *Pedagogy of Vulnerability* (pp. 259-274). Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Hantzopoulos, M., & Bajaj, M. (2021). *Educating for Peace and Human Rights: An Introduction*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Harris, I. (2002). Challenges for Peace Educators at the Beginning of the 21st Century. *Social Alternatives*, *21*(1), 28-31.

Kester, K. (2020). *The United Nations and Higher Education: Peacebuilding, Social Justice, and Global Cooperation for the 21st Century*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Kester, K., Zembylas, M., Brantmeier, E. J., & Hajir, B. (2023). Afterword: Reflections on a Post/Critical Peace Education. In. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003263111-16

Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd edition. ed.). Pearson Education.

Koppensteiner, N. (2020). A Crack in Everything: Facilitation and Vulnerability. In E. J. Brantmeier & M. K. McKenna (Eds.), *Pedagogy of Vulnerability* (pp. 103-117). Information Age Publishing, Inc.

McKenna, M. K., & Brantmeier, E. J. (2020). Pedagogy of Vulnerability: Roots, Realities, and the Future. In E. J. Brantmeier & M. K. McKenna (Eds.), *Pedagogy of Vulnerability* (pp. 1-21). Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Page, J. S. (2004). Peace education: exploring some philosophical foundations. *International review of education*, *50*(1), 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:REVI.0000018226.19305.6c

Ragandang, P. C. (2022). What are they writing for? Peace research as an impermeable metropole. *Peacebuilding*, *10*(3), 265-277. https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2021.2000159

Reardon, B. A. (1988). *Comprehensive peace education: educating for global responsibility*. Teachers College Press.

Shapiro, H. S. (2010). *Educating youth for a world beyond violence: A pedagogy for peace*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Varona, F. (2024). Appreciative Axiology: The Lens Through Which We Value the Appreciative Paradigm. *AI Practitioner*, *26*(3), 15. https://doi.org/dx.doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-60-1-10

Vaughan, M. (2019). Learning who I am: The exploration of my guiding values through a Living Theory methodology. *Educational journal of living theories*, *12*(1), 62-80. https://web-cdn.org/s/1445/file/node/12-3.pdf

Whitehead, J. (1989). Creating a Living Educational Theory from Questions of the Kind, 'How do I Improve my Practice?'. *Cambridge journal of education*, *19*(1), 41-52. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764890190106

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

Whitehead, J. (2019). Creating a living-educational-theory from questions of the kind, 'how do I improve my practice?' 30 years on with Living Theory research. *Educational journal of living theories*, *12*(2), 1-19. https://ejolts.net/node/346

Whitehead, J., & Huxtable, M. (2021). A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Educational, Professional Development. *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny*, *4*(264), 163-186. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-6007.kp.2021-4.8

Yazdanpanah, N. (2015). Pedagogy of Addressivity: Peace Education as Evaluation. In C. del Felice, A. Karako, & A. Wisler (Eds.), *Peace Education Evaluation: Learning from Experience and Exploring Prospects* (pp. 273-286). Information Age Publishing Inc.