

## 'Living love': My living-educational-theory

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### Abstract

From July 2017 to July 2019, I conducted a participatory action research (PAR) project –Continuous Professional Development through Collaborative Practice and Praxis – in a community school of Nepal with basic-level (grades 1–8) teachers. Since being introduced to the Living Educational Theory research methodology at the CARN-ALARA Conference in Split, Croatia, I have been creating my own living-educational-theory. Through this paper as a PAR facilitator, I communicate how 'living love' improves my collaboration, the collaboration of my teachers and the collaboration of the school through action-reflection cycles. I discuss how my 'living love' connects me with my 'self', with my colleagues and the teachers, and how love evolves, contextualizes and enhances other values; yet, at times, I am not always living those values and I am a 'living contradiction'.

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**Keywords:** Living contradiction; Living love; Living-educational-theory methodology

## Introduction

Initially, I conducted participatory action research (PAR) intending to improve teachers' collaboration. For it, I posed my research question, "How can I/we improve my/teachers' collaboration?" In the process of my research, I reflected on my experiences and realized that the human value, love, is a core value in an educational setting. Thereby, I began to value love in the process of facilitating teachers' collaboration, which later turned to me and my collaboration. In this paper, I used 'love' as a core human – and/or spiritual value – and 'living love' as my living value, which means 'living lovingly' or being in a state of receiving and sharing love. I will elaborate on love in a later section.

In this paper, I explain how I was introduced to Living Theory (Whitehead, 2018) and culture of inquiry (DeLong, 2002; Vaughan & DeLong, 2019) and further engaged in developing my own living-educational-theory using my own Living Theory methodology (Whitehead, 1989; 2018). By explaining my living value, 'living love,' I communicate how this influenced my own learning, the learning of my colleagues and teachers, and the learning of the school through action-reflection cycles. Introducing four phases (questioning living value, living collaboration, living consciousness, and living joy) of my research journey, I discuss how my 'living love' connected me with my 'self' and with my colleagues and the teachers, and how love evolved, contextualized and enhanced other values; yet, at times, I was not living those values and was a 'living contradiction'. Further, this paper provides evidence of how my living value becomes my standard of judgement.

## Background

On 18th October 2019, appreciating my presentation entitled "Possibility(ies) of developing contextually relevant integrated curriculum through collaborative practice and praxis" in the CARN-ALARA 2019 conference in Split, Croatia, Jackie DeLong invited me into the world of Living Theory and culture of inquiry in the collaborative workshop of Jack Whitehead, Jackie DeLong, Maria Huxtable, and Swaroop Rawal. After that, I began to engage in professional interactions with Jackie via Skype and email to create my own living-educational-theory based on my Ph.D. research. This commitment engaged me in the world of Living Theory and culture of inquiry. I begin now with some context.

### *Who am I?*

When I committed to creating my own living-educational-theory, I first posed myself the question, "Who am I?" This was the most difficult question I had ever posed myself. After seeking an answer for many months, I came up with an answer: that I am nobody or/and I am everybody. I find myself to be nobody when I have not connected myself with my inner world and my outer world, and I find myself to be everybody when I connect myself with my inner world and my outer world. My inner world is very vast. I have layers of memories, feelings, imaginations and emotions. My outer world is also very vast. Every moment I have been encountering a boundless phenomenon of the social world in the variety of activities that I experience. For instance, I have the distinct identities of woman, teacher, mother, and educator in the way I am interacting with this outer world. Every moment is new. Moreover, when my inner world and outer world converse, to my surprise in every moment, I find myself to be somebody new, the newest form of 'I'. The more I connect myself with my inner and outer worlds, the more definitions I find to define myself.

Currently, I am a part of this universe. I am a human being; I am a woman; I am a citizen of Nepal; I am a Ph.D. student; I am a participatory action researcher and living theorist; I am a mother; I am a professional educator having teaching experience of Basic, Secondary and University levels of education, school curriculum development and administration of a school in Kathmandu. Although the list goes on, I am not satisfied with these definitions of myself because my 'self' is interconnected with so many other 'selves', including my 'innerselves' and 'outer selves' that determine who I am in the present context. This paper tries to address the query, *who am I and how can I improve teachers' collaboration?* in the process of creating my own living-educational-theory.

Although I have more than two decades of teaching experience and more than five years' experience of the development of a school curriculum, my lived educational experiences (my living values) have not been taken seriously in those educational settings. Here, I don't want to blame any individual and/or institution for not acknowledging me. Rather I see the problem in the whole education system, which gives more priority to the cognitive domain than the affective domain in education, particularly in my professional growth. This concerns me. I think this is an injustice towards my profession, towards my lived educational experiences and towards my improved practices that have influenced me and my students and that have influenced my workplaces. However, in line with Whitehead and McNiff (2006), I see an opportunity in the same education system of adopting an inductive approach by generating quality theory, my own living-educational-theory, by demonstrating my competence in making scholarly judgments about my own work, and by using my values as standards of judgment.

"Practitioner researchers already know what they are doing in their everyday lives in the sense that knowledge is embodied in what they do. Each person has already had their own tacit theory within themselves about how they should live, and they work collaboratively to make sense of what they are doing by talking through their ideas and monitoring the process. They monitor what they are learning, how their learning influences their actions. Because they are doing research, they bear in mind that they need to explain how what they are doing counts as theory, so they produce their accounts of practice to show their social activity can be seen as purposeful research activity" (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p.13).

Being a practitioner in participatory action research, I lived with teachers in their real settings, addressing their real professional problems. Based on my lived experience and evidence of this, I am daring to disrupt the epistemological hegemonies of the social sciences through the purely educational, living and value-laden practices of the teachers. I believe that the teachers are the real practitioners who can influence themselves and others in better ways than can philosophers, social scientists, and psychologists. Respecting my embodied knowledge and keeping myself at the centre, I want to investigate my own practice, observe, describe and explain what I am doing in company with colleagues and teachers, in order to produce my own explanations for what I am doing and why I am doing it (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

### *What matters to me?*

I value living love because it matters to me. It is my way of living life, because it has been giving meaning to my personal and professional life. I located it in my

research inquiry and made it reality (McNiff, 2017). I also value the value-laden professional practices of the school teachers who spend their lives in the same profession improving their professional practices by living their values. An example of this is that in the initial phase of developing this paper, while discussing my field reflections with Jackie, I uncovered my value of living love in the following video on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.



**Video 1.** Daring to use the term 'love' in educational practices (Dhungana, 2020a)  
<https://youtu.be/94jkUjfVXq0>

“Jackie: You started out talking about love as value, and then you kind of put it aside and said, “No, my main values are collaboration and reflection”. So, why did you take love out as one of your main values?”

Parbati: I have evidence of collaboration and reflection like for this conference. I worked for almost a month to prepare the abstract, to prepare the presentation, so that I can develop into the paper, so I worked a lot on it and based on that I have so much evidence on it. I have gone through each component of it so that I am very much clear where I am but regarding love, it's within me. It's not explored yet. I need to investigate it in depth but like I am sure that my main value is love, nothing else, so I need to have some references, some evidence so that I dare to use the word 'love' in professional development.

Jackie: Dare to use it. Wow! And you go for it. OK!

Parbati: Because in our context, love is not like such very easily accepted not only in the university but also in the practices because being like the place where I worked few teachers are older than me and few are quite young and when I say, use the word love, then the meaning may be something different: it may be limited to the physical or some conditional love. So I did not mean to have a condition, rather it is an unconditional way of behaving, being lovingly with them. So, it's risk: so saying that, it will be a daring project.

Jackie: OK, all right, so we've established that we've got three main values: love, collaboration and reflection (Dhungana, 2020a).”

In this conversation, I have claimed that discussing ‘living love’ academically is a daring project because discussions on love are very limited within the academy. Although it has transformative possibilities (Ojha, 2017), I have never heard discussion on love or living love – at least in my context – to improve the professional practices of teachers.

For me, love is a living force and living love is living at the heart. This way of living life is meaningful to me. Pond (2000) defines love as life energy and locates love in the heart chakra which lies at the heart of human body. Elaborating the spiritual dimension of love, Pond (2000) shows the emerging and evolving nature of love. He writes:

"When we talk in our spiritual circles about awakening to the 'path of the heart', we refer to this wellspring creation: Love. The path of the heart is one that springs from your being with warmth and joy. It is not strategic, like a good plan, or anything similar. It comes from the place within each of us that is joy. It is trusting that if you live your life from this place of consciousness, all will work out in the material world as well.

It takes faith, because the modern view of life is one of struggle, and its insistence that you had better have a good plan to defend, protect and provide for yourself. This comes from a fear-based mentality-fear of scarcity. The path of the heart gives no harbour to this fear. You must have faith that you will draw to yourself a bountiful life by simply being in that place of magnetic attraction – you believe in abundance, and you attract abundance." (pp. 55–56)

Describing the self-sustaining nature of love, Pond further shows three different stages of love: "personal, compassionate, and universal" (p. 65). Personal love is about experiencing joy with our closest ones with its attachment quality. Compassionate love is higher than personal love with its forgiveness quality. The highest level of love is universal love which is unconditional warmth for all beings and beyond. When we reach this stage, in Pond's words:

"...we abide in a sea of love. Others are drawn to you and you freely give of your spirit. As you give to others, you feel the sensation of the universal energy flowing through you, and that is exactly what is happening. Your source of energy is inexhaustible at this level, so you never experience burnout or feel drained by others. Of course, you still feel tired at the end of the day, but not exhausted. You realize that when you experience an energy drain, you are giving from the wrong place. At the first sign of any exhaustion, you know that you have dropped out of the Heart Chakra and into the personal levels." (p.67)

Pond's notion of the self-sustaining and universal nature of love has influenced me and inspired me to explore further. Next, I found Buber's (1937) notion of love as an "I-Thou" relationship similar to Pond's hierarchical nature of love. According to Buber:

"Feelings are entertained: love comes to pass. Feelings dwell in man; but man dwells in his love. That is no metaphor, but the actual truth. Love does not cling to the I in such a way as to have the Thou only, for its 'content', its object; but love is between I and Thou. The man [*sic.*] who does not know this, does not know love; even though he ascribes to it the feelings he lives through. Love ranges in its effect, through the whole world. In the eyes of him who takes his stand in love, and gazes out of it, men are cut free from their entanglement in bustling activity. Good people and evil, wise and foolish, beautiful and ugly, become successively real to him; that is, set free they step forth in their singleness, and confront him as Thou." (pp.14-15)

Both Pond and Buber define unconditional love as the highest form of love. Reaching towards this point I could relate the three levels of love with Wilber's notion of three levels of human consciousness: "egocentric", "ethnocentric" and "worldcentric", which refers to "me", "my group" and "all of us" respectively (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2009, p. 42). In my understanding, "me" or 'I'-centric people love themselves and their close ones; "my group" or 'we' centric people love their particular group; "all of us" centric people love the whole of humanity selflessly. When I linked these three levels of the development or widening growth in the consciousness level of a human, I found my love for my family and my teaching

profession was 'I'-centric, the first stage. My collaboration with my colleagues and teachers for their professional development is 'we'-centric, the second stage; and my initiation for cross-professional collaboration for enhancing teachers' collaboration and engaging in creating my own living-theory is 'us'-centric or in the highest stage.

However, I experience all three stages of love and they are equally important, not hierarchical. Therefore, loving self and near ones is as important as showing love to humanity and one's own community of teachers. All the three stages are interconnected and complementary. Although my journey of love has experienced the personal to compassionate to universal, many times, I have found myself regressing to the so-called lower stages. Perhaps, being stable in the highest level is an ideal situation that I can always aspire to but has hopefully helped me to be 'living love' continuously.

Being a yoga practitioner, living love is my way of living life by not separating personal and professional but being an integrated whole. I can examine my inner world with reference to the outer world. When I become conscious of my stage of love, I can now recognise I am/not living love as I aspire to live. Then, consciously I can continue living love for the common good, a higher good. The consciousness of not attaining the higher stage always gives me the reason to move on, to be inquisitive, to ask questions and thereby grow higher. This consciousness of love is the energy of my life. However, in this paper, I am not intending to claim that I have attained the highest stage of love, rather by sharing my continuous journey I am aspiring to live the fullest life by 'living love' in all three stages whenever I need to.

Thus, love is not a new value that I require(d) or imagined would improve teachers' collaborative practices. In fact, I continued living it but in different stages in different forms by trying to be equally respecting to self, other and the rest. Therefore, my living value is 'living love.' Living love is my life energy or life-enhancing energy that grows, evolves, takes different forms, and transforms while expressing, receiving (Pond, 2000) and living it. Living love has not only transformed me and my teachers but many others in different professional settings (Campbell, 2018; Gjotterud, 2009; Laidlaw, 2015), which then provided me with the strength to move on.

The following video shows my value as a life-affirming energy that enhanced my research practices in the second Skype conversation with Jackie on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.



**Video 2.** Love as energy (Dhungana, 2020b) <https://youtu.be/JGgzs7YnSZQ>

"I am so happy working with this. And I have kept aside other things and just working on it thinking on it and trying to make like how can I improve this paper and bring it to the shape so I am really feeling energetic and to be on this task so I kept this as my priority like I have kept everything aside now." (Dhungana, 2020b)

In the video I found myself so energetic. I was excited to share my living value, which has never happened before. For the first time, I felt I was listened to with a loving heart and inhabited a safe space in which I could share my vulnerability when falling from a higher stage to a lower one, and through it gathering the strength to move on. From this experience, I can claim that living love refers to acting lovingly to self, others and all as a continuous process. It is my intention to create a safe space to live out my values and let others live out their values to the fullest by negotiating and being selfless, caring, helpful, conscious and joyful through dialogues.

### *Why was I concerned?*

I conducted my research not in my hometown but in a rural setting of Nepal in a community school with basic-level teachers. Although the teachers were expected to carry out continuous professional development in the school setting (NCED, 2016), in the initial visits I found out that they did not have a culture of sharing teaching experiences and professional learning and skills with each other. Furthermore, although collaboration is one of the major competencies of teachers for enhancing their own and students' learning (NCED, 2016), I discovered that they lacked harmonious relationships among themselves in terms of taking responsibility for continuous professional development in the school setting. While they had diverse contextual needs such as wanting to learn to manage time, teach composition, learn the use of information and communications technology (ICT), project-based, inquiry-based and art-based approaches, the majority of the teachers seemed more concerned with their individual needs than other people's.

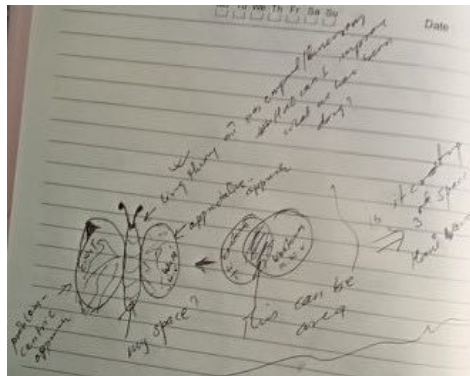
Therefore, I initiated ways to enhance their abilities in collaboration as a part of their continuous professional development in the school. My challenge was to engage all the teachers, including myself, to collaborate, discuss, cooperate, negotiate, and access common contextual needs rather than working individually. As a PAR facilitator, my major concern was to access contextual needs, find solutions, act, reflect and plan further in collaboration with them. In my personal belief system, I focus on what I can do rather than what I don't have or what I can get from others. Therefore, I decided to invest in my value, 'living love'. By being context-responsive, I was hopeful that I could show my love towards my teachers and my profession by respecting their available knowledge, skills, experiences and resources and opening my heart and mind. In my context, by opening my heart and my mind, I mean 'being lovingly' or openly creating safe spaces where teachers felt at ease and secure, able to foster their own capabilities, inspire each other, learn from each other (Briganti, 2015).

Thus, I continued living my deeply-held value, 'living love', perceiving myself as a part of my teachers' lives, and they of mine. My major aim was to create a collaborative environment for the teachers where teachers could engage in collaborative inquiry (Mezirow, 2000) consciously and joyfully, and thereby motivate them to collaborate among themselves, with students, with the head teacher and the community, and to build mutual relationships.

### **My living-educational-theory methodology**

Being assured that 'living love' could enhance teachers' collaboration I began my research by opening my heart and mind. For me, opening my heart and mind refers to an

open approach, not adopting any particular approach or theory as guidelines but rather to embrace emerging approaches and ideas needed throughout the research process to improve teachers' collaboration. Perhaps I was inclined towards multi-paradigmatic transformative research with an integral perspective (Taylor & Luitel, 2012) being all-inclusive and holistic, not one over another. However, I happened to adopt an emancipatory PAR (Kemmis, 2008) with a critical approach in the beginning of my research. Perhaps I was influenced by the Habermasian notion of "emancipatory interest", which encourages one to work for justice, equality and liberation (Grundy, 1987). Perhaps I aspired to reach the second stage of love, passionate love, envisioning harmonious relationship among teachers. Later, I found myself limited by this problem-solving approach. I was stuck. As I wanted to move on, aspiring for better relationships among teachers, I happened to ask, "How can I improve my teachers' collaboration?" This question helped me to see the problem as a possibility or opportunity. This created space to adopt an appreciative approach, which motivated me to respect our available resources and the best practices of the teachers (Boyd, & Bright, 2007). It appears that this question created a favourable space in which to balance the two different sides, as in the body of the butterfly with its two wings (see Figure 1), which I happened to create while making sense of integrated approaches.



**Figure 1** Drawing in my journal: Butterfly as a metaphor of harmonious integration of multiple approaches

Thus, like Delong (2002), I was not following any pre-defined approach but rather continued living my value of being open to develop my own living-educational-theory and my own living-theory-methodology. Quoting Dadds and Hart (2001, p.166), Delong claimed that the living-educational-theory of action research would allow us "methodological inventiveness" (p. 269). Similarly, at the end I came up with the exploration of methodological inventiveness that helped me to theorize about my living love explicitly and metaphorically (see Figure 2).

Later, I named my living-educational-theory methodology as Ardhanarishwar because I found my living-theory methodology more meaningful when seeing it in a yogic way. In yogic terms, Ardhanarishwar is an integrated and balanced form, a union of Shiva and Shakti, a Hindu god and goddess symbolizing the harmonious relation of the logical and intuitive aspects of humans (Mishra, 2017). Therefore, 'Ardhanarishwar' is a metaphor of my living-theory methodology based on its receptive, all-inclusive, holistic, integrated, self-sustained and balanced form of dialogic inquiry. Perhaps, the question, "How can I improve teachers' collaboration?" was always dwelling at the centre and created a flexible and safe



space from which to embrace emergent context-responsive approaches, to integrate and to have a harmonious interplay between multiple approaches which results in “methodological inventiveness”.



**Figure 2.** Photo painted by my friend:  
Ardhanarishwar as the metaphor of my living-educational-theory methodology

For instance, the following video, (22.1.20) reveals my embracing of an emergent and appreciative approach. It was taken at the second international conference on “Transformative Education Research and Sustainable Development” (TERSD) that was held from October 5 to 8 in Dhulikhel in Nepal.



**Video 3.** Choosing Living Educational Theory research methodology (Dhungana, 2020c)

<https://youtu.be/rBI78nZLRao>

Parbati: “This phase – how can we improve what we have been doing? – is the problem. This is the headache for me: I want to do something for my participants ...to help them rather than [simply] do what I am interested in. What I wanted to do is: *how can we improve what we have been doing?* Teachers are, of course, doing: teachers are teaching; they are trusted people; we can’t blame them every time teachers are doing nothing. We can’t say that because we are teachers, we are doing – so how can we improve? So I have looked from this aspect.” (Dhungana, 2020c)

Reaching this phase, I had already felt limited by the problem-centric approach and attracted to an appreciative approach with the help of the question, “How can I improve teachers’ collaboration?” Perhaps I was drawn to this question because of its potential to improve myself and the world in which I live and work. I quote this from the “Advice to Author/s” on the Educational Journal of Living Theories website:

“Living Educational Theory research is a form of practitioner self-study research distinguished by the practitioner researcher's valid explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations within which they practice. A practitioner researcher engages in Living Educational Theory research to research their practice to understand and improve it and in the process clarify their embodied living ontological and social values that form their explanatory principles of their explanations of educational influence in learning and the standards by which they evaluate improvements in the educational influence of their practice.” (<https://ejolts.net/review>)

To improve what I do, I engaged teachers in a collaborative enquiry that opened up the new possibilities of creating new knowledge individually and collectively through action-reflection cycles. The action-reflection cycles helped me to live my value continuously through my reflective practices, to assess the quality of my work and improve teachers' collaboration.

I took my value of living love as my standard of judgment. I looked into my data texts to analyze whether I was living love or a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989). As data, I brought all the suitable evidence from my reflective journal-entry, transcribed data texts and photograph and video clips to claim my value of living love, to examine whether I am being loving and respectful to myself, the other and everyone, or not. I wanted to see whether I was living my value and letting others live their values to the fullest, by negotiating and being selfless, caring, helpful, conscious and joyful through our dialogues, or not.

Then I collected evidence from my critical friends. I invited my colleagues Shree, Roshani, Bineeta, Binod and Amir to be my critical friends in a validation group to test the validity for my claim to be living love and whether I was a living contradiction. The group are PAR researchers who were at the same school as the study-site in the same academic sessions from July 2017 to July 2019, and in different periods of time with different topics for research. I presented my work to my critical friends and validation groups. They provided feedback. In the light of my evaluation, I improved and modified my ideas and practices.

Thus, I was involved in “culture of inquiry” (Vaughan & Delong, 2019) and examined whether I was living my values or not. In their article, *Cultures of inquiry: a transformative method of creating living-theories*, Michelle Vaughan and Jackie Delong show that “cultures of inquiry can be both micro and macro as well as sustained and spontaneous,” (Vaughan & Delong, 2019, p. 71). The space that Jackie had created for me from which I wrote this article is an example of the micro. The work I did with the teachers in the rural school community serves as a macro culture of inquiry, defined as:

“A culture of inquiry is a safe, supportive space wherein practitioner-researchers are enabled to share their vulnerabilities, to make explicit their values, and to hold themselves accountable for living according to those values. They learn to recognize when they are not living according to their espoused values and are what Jack Whitehead (1989) calls “living contradictions.” (*ibid.*, p. 17)

## How have I (not) lived my values?

In this section I will discuss how I critically reflect on and gradually move from the state of not living my value to investing in my value, ‘living love’ in action, and how ‘living

love' takes different context-responsive forms like 'living collaboration'. I show how love evolves and enhances other values like help, respect, empathy, consciousness, connectedness and joy in the four phases of my research: Needs Assessment phase (questioning my living value); Cycle 1 (living collaboration); Cycle 2 (living consciousness); and Cycle 3 (living joy). In addition, I will explain how 'living love' improves teachers' collaboration and improves a school culture.

### **Describing and explaining my living values**

Before beginning to enhance harmonious relationships between teachers, I examined myself to see whether I was harmonious with myself or not. As well as that, I evaluated my own professional practices to uncover my relationships with colleagues. Surprisingly, I found little harmony within myself and with others in my professional setting. I felt I was disconnected both with my inner and outer world. For instance, I discovered that I did not enjoy working with colleagues and would rather work alone. I was more concerned with me and my well-being than the common good. I was thinking about improving others rather than improving myself: I was more critical of others rather than critically reflecting on my practices. I also noticed a similar situation with the teachers in my initial visits who had less-harmonious relationships among themselves. In this context I was a living contradiction, as I was not 'living love' as I was not self-reflecting for the common good, which I discovered while sharing "what really matters to me" with Jackie (10.1.2020).



**Video 4.** From individualistic to collaborative (Dhungana, 2020d)

<https://youtu.be/vZnJ0XYNK8>

Parbati: "The work which I want to do with your help is about collaboration. My research is on teachers' professional development through collaboration and reflection. So, I have seen collaboration and reflection as one of the values which I have been working on and also reflection, as my approach is participatory action research. If I look into collaboration and reflection as my major values so that I can bring all those wholeheartedness in the discussion. Because collaboration is a spiritual value that value has driven me towards other spiritual values. So, in the beginning I felt like I was not collaborative. I was more individualistic. I used to be on my own, working alone, not liking to be with the people. I did not used to enjoy it at all. But gradually I found a kind of synergy with other people. More than myself when I am connected with them, there is something new which I get every time and that makes me feel alive. And that is very much energetic like there may be terms which I am not able to express right now but I feel so energetic when I connect to people, communicate with them and find some new meaning in it, whether it is in research and in everyday life." (Dhungana, 2020d)

Then, Marsick and Yorks' (2000) notion of collaborative inquiry helped me to decide to collaborate with colleagues and thereby maintain reflective journal entries and became a part of the community of practice and was present in the PAR workshops. This provided

ample opportunity to participate in collaborative practices and reflect on my living value within the university setting before going into the field. Explaining the positive influence of the shared room and community of practices in my initial phase, I conversed with Jackie in the following video clip (10<sup>th</sup> January, 2020).



**Video 5.** Shared office (Dhungana, 2020e)

<https://youtu.be/aSYUKq9-eWA>

“Jackie: How did you improve your practice, particularly in collaboration?”

Parbati: I told you I was more individualistic. I used to love to work alone but when I started PhD course in Kathmandu University, School of Education, we two Ph.D. students were enrolled: there was one research assistant, one Postdoc and our Supervisor and we were set in such a way we were given one room, for two Ph.D. students and a Postdoc and together we used to share the same office and every time my supervisor used to come to our office and share the notice and he used to talk about all the things which we needed to discuss in the project and in our study. So, we were there in the office sharing the office, sharing together, developing tools together and working on other areas being in the same office and slowly and gradually we developed baseline tools and that we worked together in collaboration, we discussed, we put into our issues there, we visited the field together and slowly and gradually I learnt to be together with the people and began to enjoy.” (Dhungana, 2020e)

Involvement in the collaborative practice and praxis was preparing me to become more observant and conscious of my context. For example, I learned how to observe power dynamics, how to dress, how to give a voice to all the teachers, how to listen to them and how to create space for democratic participation. In addition, I learned that negotiation is a prerequisite for building a mutual relationship and to enhance collaborative practices. For instance, on 22.2.2018 when we three co-researchers, Shree, Roshani and I, were sitting in a room improving our baseline tools, I spotted the importance of negotiation in the collaborative process, particularly in my workplace. I made the following entry in my journal.

“...We discussed. And they (Roshani and Shree) began to debate for almost an hour. She wanted to keep a drawing activity in the base-line assessment tool to make it participatory. He did not like the idea as he believed that drawing activity takes a long time. I was OK in either case. Suddenly I happened to think of my field and found myself in a similar situation. What should I do? Should I remain neutral? How can I bring harmony? ...I requested them to postpone the decision till tomorrow. They did not look happy, but they agreed. The next day she decided not to include the drawing activity. But I sensed he was feeling good and she was feeling bad. I sensed that it was a negotiation process for a common good.” (Dhungana, reflective journal, 22.2.2018)

At that time, perhaps I was envisioning my future role, the role of the collaborator, which led me to ask them to pause and not to decide in a hurry. I knew that both of them

were arguing for making the baseline tools better, but there was a need for negotiation for the common good. Valuing my role, Roshani said:

“So, true! Many times, I was rigid and did not want to change the baseline. However, learning collaboratively, I learned to be flexible and let go for the common good. I have mentioned this in my paper as well but a different version. Where is this recorded?” (Roshani, response to initial draft, 24.11.2019)

Similarly, supporting my claim of creating a suitable environment for collaboration, Shree writes:

“This often happened in the early days of our PAR project. Together with our works, our perspectives and beliefs were also in collaboration. Often our ways of seeing things were in contradiction to one another. There we would engage in dialogues. Sometimes, our dialogues would take the form of debate. Roshani was well-informed in research procedures and tools. There I had to hear from her. At the same time, as I grew up in rural Nepal, and as I already had some research experiences in public schools from rural settings, I often brought contextual relevance of the study tools into discussion. I guess, Parbati’s role was more as midway negotiator. As our discussion would go along, she would crack short humour and would create a comfortable space for us to realize one another’s standpoints.” (Shree, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

This is the first evidence of my learning that I value harmonious relationships and I initiated activities to keep harmony among my colleagues with my open heart and open mind. This developed the inner faith and confidence that I can influence myself, and others as well in an education setting by negotiating for the common good.

This confidence motivated me to become responsible for initiating a four-day workshop at their convenience to access the contextual needs in the school. In the workshop, in collaboration with Shree and Roshani, I oriented all the teachers including the head teacher towards the possibilities of transformative learning and a participatory approach to research in the school for the teachers’ professional development. In this workshop, I negotiated my role as I decided to facilitate and prepare presentational materials which respected my colleagues’ strengths. Subsequently, while discussing the emerging issues of the teachers and their possible solutions, I conducted a ‘resource mapping’ activity intended to explore what we had created, which was to show respect for the available resources of the school and to negotiate for their professional development needs.

‘Living love’ influenced me significantly. Before joining the Ph.D. program, I used to enjoy working alone but ‘living love’ and collaborating added joy to my life. In the beginning of my research, a journal entry shows:

“...I am feeling comfortable with Shree. He is better informed in theoretical and methodological references...together in the field work...he is an easy-going man. The way he lives in the present moment makes me feel good. He’s also helpful to me and others. I sense a kind of positive learning environment being with him...I enjoy his company.” (Dhungana, reflective journal, 5.4.2018)

This may have been the first time I realized I was enjoying collaborative work. Similarly, my 'living love' influenced teachers in three ways. First, they began to negotiate; secondly, they learned to respect each other; and thirdly, they began to enjoy what they had. For instance, in the four-day needs-assessment workshop, all the teachers worked collaboratively: they discussed, negotiated, prioritized issues, and then decided to work on the first two issues in common in that academic session. My journal entry records their joyfulness in their collaborative practices as:

"We came with doubt and fear... but all the teachers participated actively in the workshop. Many teachers seem joyful. The four teachers presented, and all the teachers reflected and shared their new understanding openly." (Dhungana, personal journal, 10.4.2018).

As I began to respect what I have and what I can do, what my teachers have and what my teachers can do rather than regret what I/we don't have and what I/we cannot do, we, the teachers and my colleagues, began to value 'respect'. Supporting this claim, Shree said:

"Our needs assessment valued respect of one kind and the other. During group meetings, we would listen more from teachers. Doing so, we were respecting their experiential knowledge. It was also a respect for difference in perspectives. Second form of respect was seen in locally available resources and wisdom traditions. Arriving at the end of this point of time, those teachers who would say, "Give us training from outside experts", began to learn from one another and respect their views. In project works teachers used locally-available resources and encouraged students to use them. Perhaps, it enhanced students' sense of respect to their own culture and available resources. (Shree, response to initial draft, 2.11.2019)

Using "we" Shree showed our "good-quality conversation" (Gumede & Mellett, 2019) the mutual relationship and a willingness to collaborate and participate in the collaborative practices by all the teachers, including the head teacher. This indicated the positive influence of my 'living love' in the social formation of the workplace.

From this phase I learned to reflect critically before taking any action to bring change in others, to work on any weakness, to live my value, to collaborate and reflect on being in the professional learning community, and to negotiate for building mutual relationships. Similarly, it shows that building mutual relationships prepares a favourable space for planning to work for the common good.

### **Living collaboration**

Based on the reflection from the participatory needs-assessment and feedback from the validation groups, I moved beyond a narrow understanding of collaboration as a competency. In line with Marques, Dhiman, and King (2007) I, along with the other teachers, decided to improve our collaboration, a spiritual value that inhabits all of us. When all the teachers decided to collaborate or live this value as a part of their professional development, I realized collaboration had become a living value of the teachers. 'Being lovingly' I valued the teachers' own value of harmonious relationships. Pond (2000) defines love as a harmonious connection, a core drive, which lies in our hearts and the centre of our energies.

Consequently, 'living collaboration' became a common value or a hidden curriculum in the teachers' professional development.

With this living value, I planned to do two things: (1) to become a role model and (2) to form a professional learning community. By "walking the talk" (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019), being "an animator" (Rahman, 2008), I modelled a way of learning in order to influence the teacher-participants to make meaning collaboratively through dialogic discourse (Mezirow, 2000). Believing "changing myself in the near environment helps to empower those people, over there and myself" (Maguire, 1987), I continued in my collaboration with Shree and in collaboration with the other teachers. I formed a Professional Learning Community (Dufour, 2004) comprised of all the basic-level teachers as co-researchers, and the head teacher as a teacher leader, and we conducted collaborative and collective planning and reflection meetings and workshops.

'Living collaboration' enhanced my professional life as I began to collaborate with other colleagues and provided helping hands that led to a reciprocal relationship. In the whole process of my research, I always opened my heart to help, listen and share with Shree. Agreeing with me, Shree writes:

"Our collaboration had pedagogical meaning as well. For example, working with teachers and students, I was engaged in finding possibilities to contextualize school teaching and learning processes. Parbati was working with those teachers for their school-based continuous professional development. This is called pedagogical collaboration between curriculum and curriculum developers/ implementers. Whenever I had to work with teachers, I would turn to her for support. Perhaps, our willingness to support one another without any visible margin like 'whose responsibility is this?' connected us. We continued this spirit till the end of the PAR cycles." (Shree, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

My journey of 'living collaboration' continued when I collaborated with Bineeta. As she was also working with a few teachers and with students, intending to improve the collaborative practices of the teachers, I collaborated with her in her school garden project. This collaboration made me feel that her project is not only her project but also my project, our project. I opened my heart to help her, to listen to her, to share with her. Showing our heart-to-heart connection she writes:

"The bonding built with Parbati is not only the academic senior but a loving sister who always helped me to reflect on my activities to make me a better person." (Bineeta, response to initial draft, 22.11.2019)

Her open heart influenced me to involve myself in her project and as a result I engaged in collaborative activities with the teachers, students, researchers and local professionals. I helped her by taking photos and videos for her records and observed the collaborative practices of the teachers. She did not feel disrupted but rather she appreciated my help in responding to her needs. Noticing my passion, she wrote:

"While writing my thesis, I view the photos and videos of my field work and reflect how passionately Parbati always captured my field work through the lens. The photos and videos were my evidence for the field work," (Bineeta, response to initial draft, 22.11.2019).

My/our 'living collaboration' enhanced my value of living compassionate love which built a trusting environment. For instance, presenting in the TERSD Conference I confidently responded to a participant about how I valued connection between my teachers and myself, and how I valued trust based on my experience (10.1.2020).



**Video 6.** Trust in PAR (Dhungana, 2020f) <https://youtu.be/rcat-A6NcGo>

"Participant: I could not be present in all the presentations but the topic that you have chosen is similar to my thesis as I have also done action research. On your slide you have chosen equality, equity and liberation.

Parbati: Right!

Participant: In my view, you have used liberty. Did you have any constraints that you will track out liberty in a right way where you want because there is always a chance they may go out of track. Have you thought anything about that in your research?

Parbati: Like, your query, trust is very important in participatory action research. If you don't trust your learners there won't be the research. So, going out of the track, you believe they won't go. There should be trust between participants and yourself. They are like you. So, then only there should be some bonding. If you don't trust, you need to be truthful first." (Dhungana, 2020f)

Our trust influenced my colleagues and my teachers. Bineeta, in collaboration with Shree and myself, planned, conducted and reflected on an educational visit. In the whole process of her research I continued my support and she also offered help to me at times. This means, I believe, that both of us began to value 'helping each other'. As we helped each other, care became a shared value and we soon created a harmonious relationship between us. I began to feel good when I was heard. I also actively listened to her. She would share her reflections and ask for feedback. I also received and offered feedback. Recalling one of the incidents she said:

"I was raised in the Mongolian (one of the ethnic groups of Nepal) circle and always made straightforward communication with my co-researchers. Once I was discussing my school garden work with the school head teacher and the way I present my ideas was too dominating. This was observed by Parbati and later on when I was discussing the day's reflection with her on the same day, she mentioned to me how I used my language to the co-researcher (school head teacher). This helped me not only in my academic work but also in my personal life." (Bineeta, response to initial draft, 22.11.2019)

I found that a 'living collaboration' enhanced our active and joyful collaboration in the group projects as teachers and my colleagues joyfully and actively participated in the group meetings, group presentations, group work and group visits. As Shree said:



“Teachers were often busy with their scheduled tasks. Therefore, as university researchers we had to be very flexible with them. Considering teachers’ time, often we had to postpone our schedules. We took it easy. When we had nothing to do, Parbati and me would walk round the village and have tea in the local tea shops. Jokes and humours were always there. There we learned how joy and happiness can be spread and transferred. Perhaps, our ways of finding joy in every activity we do, helped in creating a joyful environment around us. On the way to home and to school, villagers would stop and talk to us. They would invite us to have tea in their house. We would find ways to add laughter. It strengthened our connection with the villagers and with school teachers and students. Joy, fun, humour, and playfulness happened to be the most powerful means to continue the PAR journey together.” (Shree, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

As all the teachers including high school teachers and the head teacher were involved in my project, my project became a school improvement program. On 5.8.2018, when I shared my learning in my validation group, my supervisor Bal Chandra said:

“I have got information from the community member about your engagement in the field. He told good things about their engagement. The school is progressing. Teachers are coming to the school on time. They take full classes. Students are also not out of the school.”

This phase taught me that ‘living love’ has been expanding in the form of ‘living collaboration’ and enhancing our (my, colleagues’ and teachers’) professional values like collaboration, joy, trust, inclusion and care, as I have influenced the social formation. ‘Living collaboration’ taught me a significant lesson that collaboration is our professional strength and our common value has enhanced teachers’ collaborative practices. However, at the same time, I realized that all the teachers were not fully joyful and active while participating in the big group. This led to Cycle 2 focused on ‘living consciousnesses.’

### **Living consciousness**

Reflecting from our collaborative practices and feedback from critical friends and validation groups, our team realized that we needed to work with a small group to deepen our collaboration, that is, to engage actively and joyfully in the collaborative practices. Intending to live collaboration, we divided into small groups to learn the use of a computer and community-based classroom projects. I consciously observed teachers’ use of the computer and participation in community-based projects. Participating, observing and reflecting together with teachers revealed that learning computer skills with colleagues is more joyful than learning with the head of departments; and planning community projects with colleagues is more joyful than classroom individual projects.

In this phase, being with teachers in their settings, I began to value the importance of careful observation and a consciousness of all of the five senses: touch, taste, sight, hearing, and smell. For instance, when a community member identified me as an outsider by seeing me holding a mineral water bottle, I began to drink tap water like them. When Shree and the teachers interacted for hours, I began to learn to listen more. When I observed the voice of men dominating the community and the parent-teacher meetings, I learned to appreciate how women negotiate and create a favourable environment, maintaining their low profile to let their men lead the meeting, raise their voices, discuss and negotiate with questions like, “What do you mean by this?” When I walked for almost 45 minutes every day to reach the

school, I learnt to value sweat and soil and live like the locals. With the same aspiration, Shree said:

“Perhaps, being conscious of our immediate role as PAR researchers, relating to the immediate human landscape was more important for us. We were cautious in selecting our dress-up. Parbati was always in simple village-like dress and so did I. Instead of looking for a vehicle of any kind, we preferred to walk for hours every day. We preferred to eat at local shops, together with villagers, the same food that they would eat. It was not always easy. But we made it part of our joy. Perhaps, this awareness from our side to value their way of living enabled community members to find them identical to us. It brought a few visible impacts. For example, every day we would reach school at exactly the same time. Our time consciousness made some irregular teachers aware to arrive at the school on time.” (Shree, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

Similarly, ‘living collaboration’ enhanced my value of love as I began to feel more empathetic towards teachers. For example, when a teacher was distressed about parental disengagement in the school, I realized that we had shared issues about the need of parents’ participation and collaboration. My use of a video camera throughout my research helped me to become more conscious of my values. Presenting in the TERSD Conference in 2018, I claimed how hearts-on activities enhanced the collaborative practices of the teachers (10.1.2020).



**Video 7.** Giving importance to heart (Dhungana, 2020g)

<https://youtu.be/wjYETFr7ZOE>

Parbati: “So I want to think it differently: thinking differently I am trying to make it a different way of learning. What I have discovered is it is not only like in previous slide, it’s about particularly focusing on mind, particularly on body or heart. Competences, skills or human values – rather there should be balance between all the three. This could be a holistic development or perhaps this could be transformation.” (Dhungana, 2020g)

Thus, ‘living collaboration’ significantly affected the teachers’ levels of critical consciousness. They began to ask more self-critical questions. I have five sets of data to provide evidence that shows teachers’ critical consciousness. The first came at the end of the second cycle; after collegial learning, teachers wanted to learn how to use a computer from an ICT professional. Reflecting critically, an elementary level teacher remarked:

“We realized that we are three types of ICTs learners: having no/less knowledge and skill about computers, having a little knowledge and skill about computers and having basic knowledge and skill of computer use. When we invited a computer professional from the university as a researcher, why did he exclude the first and the second categories and only included the third category? We also want to learn from the professional.” (Dhungana, reflective journal, 5.10.2018)

In similar vein, a teacher thinking critically, confidently shared her experience of how she raised a question about her salary and overwork, and how she had been not acknowledged by the school management about her multi-grade teaching. The final evidence emerged that after developing a local curriculum, and being self-critical, teachers decided not to implement the local curriculum without consent from the local government. Supporting me Shree writes:

“Our collaboration with teachers and school family gradually fostered awareness among both parties. Arriving at the end of the second cycle, most of the teachers were more enthusiastic with outdoor teaching and learning. They began to come with their own thoughtful and innovative ideas. Those who would remain silent in group meetings now began to speak bringing evidence from their own experiences.” (Shree, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

Moreover, the school honoured our ‘living collaboration’ by providing us with a letter of appreciation for our contribution to the ICTs integration in its Annual Function Day.

This phase taught me that ‘living love’ or/and ‘living collaboration’ can enhance professional values like consciousness, critical-thinking and collaboration. It can foster inquisitiveness in teachers as they become more critical and self-critical. However, the challenge remained to enhance joyful collaboration of the grade 1–3 teachers.

### Living joy

Based on the reflection and the feedback from critical friends and validation groups, I conducted focus-group discussions with the head of departments and the basic-level teachers, i.e. teachers of children from four to twelve years old. From it, I realized that I was not fully living out my values and influencing all teachers equally. Therefore, my concern was to improve the collaborative practices of the teachers of the children from four to seven (i.e. Level 1).

Knowing the aesthetic value of arts and respecting teachers’ best practices and with their willingness, we invited a local professional artist to the school to enhance learning arts together with the students in the school. We conducted a workshop for a week in which all the teachers, and the students from grades one to three, sat together and sketched and painted some local artefacts. All the participating teachers enjoyed this activity as all the teachers and students participated actively from the first day to the last day, sharing ideas, skills and laughter. This collaborative practice brought an arts-based, contextual local curriculum to Level 1.



**Image 1.** Photograph of my students, teachers and a local artist, taken by me

Broadening our collaborative practices, we invited a researcher from the university for a parental engagement project, realizing that parental engagement in the school is an

important factor in students' effective learning (Kalin & Steh, 2010). This project created an opportunity for us and the two more reluctant teachers who actively participated in the project to collaborate with the parents, because parents' engagement in the school was very low.

Besides enjoying sketching and painting I was becoming more empathetic towards colleagues. For instance, Bineeta piloted a school garden project in the school. Although the students and teachers were enthusiastic and active in the process, the construction work of the school damaged the school garden. When the garden was destroyed, 'being loving' I shared Bineeta's pain. Recalling her pain, she writes:

"This moment, I was devastated, heartbroken, the tears literally rolled down my cheeks. I thought that my thesis has ended and I have to start again. The way Parbati encouraged me and appreciated the efforts I made during my entire field work made me feel a little hopeful. She helped me to understand that PAR is not only about successful stories but it's about the research process where unsuccessful stories also have a place." (Bineeta, response to initial draft, 22.11.2019)

This way, I was 'living love' and being empathetic in the process of my research that influenced my colleagues and teachers. I finished the data collection process in March 2019 by conducting three activities. In the first one, I talked with teachers individually and reflected on the experiences of the collaborative practices and praxis for their professional development. Reaching this stage, Shree also began to value empathy. Sharing one of the experiences of a community visit, she said:

"It was fun learning. Today class six and seven students were full of joy. Together with their teachers, they were going to visit nearby communities. Parbati and I joined the group. We visited a few temples in the community. We also visited nearby schools. Students asked many questions to the social studies subject teacher. Some students made notes. A local leader was so passionate to share myths and folktales related to the heritages around. We saw empathetic connections between students, the community and its heritages." (Shree, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

Not only that, teachers began to feel connected with the community. In one of the visits, a teacher said:

"Being a bridge you were building relationships with community and neighbouring schools. Although I studied in the same school, I never returned there. That day, I met my teachers in that school ... a reunion." (transcribed data, 3.8.2019).

In the second activity, we conducted a reflective meeting with a validation group to validate our 'living collaboration,' our developed sense of interconnectedness and also the harmonious relationship between the community and the school. The transcribed notes from a recording of a parent show this relationship:

"Every day they used to go to the school carrying bags like students. They reached on time at 10 am, stay whole day, sometimes even before teachers reach school...It has positive impact in the school as parents and students noticed changes in teachers' discipline...punctuality and regularity of teacher and the students...positive changes in students' behaviour... I talked

with water management committee to see the possibility of water resource management in the school to sustain school garden.” (transcribed data, 3.8.2019)

Finally, in the community meeting, a few members committed themselves selflessly to sharing their experience and knowledge with the students and the teachers. Showing the value of respect, a community member shared their understanding of the changes in the children in terms of discipline and respect. Furthermore, the transcribed notes show the positive effects of living collaboration in this social formation:

“We need to do what interests us. Then we need to learn to improve our own practices rather than learning and doing completely new things copying others. Unhealthy competition does not work. We need to do which our soil suits. We need to share our knowledge and skills with others in need. We need to respect each other’s skills and knowledge. This strengthens our collaboration in the community. This envisions the community as a learning centre.” (transcribed data. 3.8.2019)

In the third activity, Bal Chandra, Shree, Bineeta, Binod and I, together with the head teacher and the other teachers, conducted a three-day arts-based workshop, and then institutionalized the best practices, developed teachers’ individual action plans and improved the school improvement plan (SIP) for the new academic session. In this workshop, the teachers developed individual action plans and committed themselves to implementing them. They helped the head teacher to improve the SIP by contributing their inputs and commitments actively and joyfully. Binod, who was observing the whole process writes:

“At the beginning, I used to think that school teachers might not be supportive and positive to develop SIP [School Improvement Plan], and to keep innovative ideas/plans in SIP. As I interacted with school teachers and HT [Head Teacher], I found that almost all teachers are very positive and motivated to continue the success stories and to welcome innovative ideas for their professional development. The good part was that there was a culture of collaboration and respect among teachers. A few teachers were interested in ICT-integrated pedagogy, and a few were more interested to work with community people. A few teachers were showing their interest to develop labs (such as mathematics and science). The event made me happy that I could continue my field work in a very positive and productive environment.” (Binod, response to initial draft, 21.11.2019)

Similarly, the head teacher consciously included students, teachers, support staff and the university researchers to reflect on the current SIP and to plan and improve it.

From this phase I learnt that the integration of the arts brings joy to professional life which enhances the collaboration of the teachers. ‘Living love’ or ‘living collaboration’ creates a joyful learning environment in the school setting. Further, it prepares a favourable space for teachers to be creative, innovative and futuristic.

### **What did I learn as I created my living-educational-theory?**

From this process of creating my own living-educational-theory, reflecting on my lived experiences, revisiting my reflections, remaking meanings with the help of critical friends and validation groups, I learnt a great lesson that has created a solid foundation for

future planning. This process has helped me to realize my role as a flexible facilitator, like a fascia in our human body that enables muscle movement. The flexible facilitator creates safe and joyful spaces by being at the centre/margin (Sameshima & Greenhood, 2015). By living in a community of validation group and critical friends, I was able to realize how I had created a safe and joyful space for the teachers.

Being with Jackie, I learnt how the sharing of experience can be transformative. I could open my heart and mind easily and become vulnerable, which prepared a space for sharing my strengths and weaknesses. Our dialogues helped me to go through the process of knowing who I am and who I am not. This process also taught me to adapt multiple approaches, formal and informal approaches with multiple lenses, traditions of Western Modern and Eastern Wisdom. Furthermore, it prepared me to value commonly-held values through a communal form of living and to create a culture of inquiry to influence myself, my colleagues and my university working culture for a higher good. In short, this process helped me to create my own living-educational-theory out of the continuous evolving and cyclical nature of the learning processes.

Finally, I learnt that my value of 'living love' is an explanatory principle that explains my influence at three levels. At the first level, myself, it enhanced my other values like joy, care, consciousness, empathy, and respect. At the second level, other people and 'living collaboration' influenced me, my colleagues' and teachers' collaborative practices through cross-professional collaboration and enhanced professional values like collaboration, joy, trust, inclusion and consciousness. And at the third level, 'living love' helped to improve plans for improvements in school and in its programs. It also helped to improve relationships between the school, the community and the university. Thus I am now inspired to continue living this value of 'living love,' as a way of living my life to contribute to human flourishing.

## Conclusion

In the process of developing my living-educational-theory I realized that I have the capacity for interconnectedness which I can put into practice to enhance my professional work. I am part of a community that helps me to see the nature of my influence and provides critical feedback on my claims to know, like my family, friends, colleagues, teachers, students, supervisors and the readers with whom I live my personal and professional life. They examine whether I am living my values and whether I am a "living contradiction". Who I am is not stagnant but keeps changing in different contexts depending on my ontological and epistemological values. One of my colleagues, who attended my PAR workshop session, defined me as "Yoga".

"I liked your session. I learnt how to pause in between, listen to others and observe everything. I am impressed by your approach-open heart-open mind...I must say you have really experienced what my Gurudev told me that maintaining constant balance and awareness between the inner world and outer world is Yoga. Yoga is not simply bending your body and breathing exercise; it is the experiential path where you will experience your real eternal identity under the guidance of your Guru (Swami SatyanandaSaraswati) ... He told me that the moment you find the real continual balance in the inner world and outer world, you will have the rare experience of unconditional love (God) for everyone, you will find what you really are; in you and in everyone and the duality will vanish." (transcribed data, 25.7.2019)

According to him, I am, “Yoga”, a balanced being, having the unison of heart and mind. In addition, my supervisor Sigrid commented:

“Because of your passion, love and belief in the project you devoted your time and you put your heart out to them by working side-by-side with the teachers. You could have chosen a different path for pursuing your academic career.” (Sigrid, response to initial draft, 2.11.2019)

She considers me as having unison of mind, heart and hands. In other words, I am a whole person. At the same time, I am also the parts of the whole; but, I am not a separate self, rather an interconnected being as I participate in the world and grow by being inquisitive, conscious and joyful for common good, sharing, receiving and living love. Perhaps I am integrating spiritual and intellectual aspects of living life.

Finally, to my readers, I ask for your responses to strengthen my research and writing, so that I can continue to grow by engaging in Living Educational Theory research.

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