



How Living Educational Theory Helps Me to be Mindfulness of the Things I Have and Find My Value in Life

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 29 January 2024
Revised: 1 August 2024
Accepted: 14 September 2024
Published Online: 12 November 2024

Keywords:

Early Childhood Education
Educational Value
Living Educational Theory
School Counselor

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects my living-theory education, addressing my concerns and strategies in navigating my current role as a Preschool Teacher. Transitioning from my background as a Counsellor for teenagers and adults to working with young children has been challenging, particularly due to their limited communication skills, making it difficult to understand their needs. Additionally, I've struggled to accept this career path while grappling with societal perceptions. As an unmarried young teacher without children, I often face doubts about my understanding of parenting challenges. Despite these hurdles, I remain committed to my educational philosophy: every child has the right to learn and develop, especially those facing difficulties. I've found purpose in supporting students as they navigate their early, uncertain views of the world. Exploration during early development fosters learning and discovery. For children, a love of learning should be nurtured through varied play experiences, which are crucial for appropriate development. Unfortunately, play is often undervalued in many early education settings, despite its importance. Using Montessori and play-based methods, I design classroom activities that promote simple understanding and encourage imagination. Through this journey, I've realized my vital role in shaping children's learning experiences, which they may not always receive at home. This process has deepened my appreciation for the transformative power of early education, reinforcing my belief that every activity in early childhood contributes meaningfully to their development.

How to Cite: Sarah, C. (2024). How Living Educational Theory Helps Me to be Mindfulness of the Things I Have and Find My Value in Life. *Glocal Praxis in Elementary Education*, 1, 48-58.

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Purpose is a complex word lacking a concise definition. It can signify a reason or intent for something being done, the cause or creation of something to exist, or the determination behind an objective to reach a result (Cambridge, 2022). Others consider purpose as separate from a general sense of meaning in life, but that it is defined by a sense of goals, direction in life, and enthusiasm for the future (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Before I accepting and being lived with my current role as a preschool teacher, I have always wanted to be a school counselor or counselor in an institution, I instinctively believe that I am very talented and passionate in the role of being a counselor because I am so in love with psychology, human being and counseling, that is why I often spent some time at the beginning of my career volunteering as a counselor under the supervision of my lecturers and as a research volunteer at Indonesian Satir Counseling community to strengthen my knowledge and capacity from 2020 until now which I am very proud of. Then at the end of 2022, I took part in counselor training by an institution (Pribudaya Foundation) in the specific issue of gender-based violence with ethical feminist for a year and now I became a part time counselor in this institution. This is a very great opportunity since I have been interested in feminist issues and gender equality when I was studying multicultural counseling in college. The following are my activities while joining the counselor community from 2020 until now.

The journey of my career experiences has grown my pedagogical and value-based concerns. Since being a preschool teacher for 3 years, I often find that most of these children tend to be neglected by their working parents and they are closer and more taken care of by their nanny or grandma/grandpa. Some children feel awkward with their parents and do not even dare to look at them. They work tirelessly from morning until night. Due to that, they might not be aware they have neglected or ignored their child/children in their upbringing (Mohamad, Ismail, Abdul, Manja, & Yusof, 2020). As someone who was neglected during my childhood by my working parents, I do not want my students to grow up feeling anxious, insecure, and even overthinking their self-worth which is the impact of being neglected as I experienced. I still remember when I was a child, my father worked as an architect who always carried out projects out of town. I do not have a close relationship with my father because he spends most of his time working out of the city for long periods of time. He could spend a whole year in another city while my mother was also working.

Most of my time is spent with my brother, we go to the same school so we often do things together and wait together for our mother to come home. Fatherless children may have fathers, but some types of jobs require fathers to leave the house for a long time, including migrant workers, transportation/shipping sector workers, contract/project workers, and informal sector workers, such

as construction workers, pedicab drivers, and others. “Children may be fatherless because their father dies or they are not physically or emotionally present in caring for children. Some biological fathers sometimes abandon or disown their children. In fact, the presence of a father impacts child development. A father’s presence is important for children’s emotional development because it can provide stability, protection, and a sense of security (Anugrah, 2024)”. According to this article, I also experienced myself as a fatherless child, where my father was working in the construction field who rarely home and present in caring for me as a child. “Children may experience low self-confidence, difficulty understanding social norms and interacting with others, and difficulty building healthy interpersonal relationships. Therefore, children who grow up in a fatherless environment are more vulnerable to being trapped in unhealthy relationships or “toxic relationships.” Children may experience low self-confidence, difficulty understanding social norms and interacting with others, and difficulty building healthy interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, children who grow up in a fatherless environment are more vulnerable to being trapped in unhealthy relationships or “toxic relationships.” said Ike Anggraika, M.Si., psychologist in this research article. During my growing up when I was 17 to 23 years old I was in a phase of emotional and physical dependence on every partner I had in the past, I felt like I always needed validation and was afraid of being abandoned until finally when I had my heart broken, trust issues and lack of self-confidence emerged. I do not know how to have a healthy relationship, because in the past I tended to blame my partner and often begged not to be left.

I get better in knowing myself, in setting boundaries to others, how to interact with others, and see the difference between healthy and toxic relationships. I kept because I decided to change and break the cycle of misery by seeking resources and help to empower myself. Now, I live better than before and I am more functional in life.

My Education Values

Educational processes are fundamentally nonlinear, unpredictable, and even mysterious; this may be difficult for researchers to accept, but teachers are often comfortable with this characteristic of their work (Luwisch, 2007). My value in education is I want to keep learning and developing myself, therefore I always keep it to be 'a lifelong learner'. The things I have done recently included training to strengthen my capacity from January to April 2024, it was national training for early childhood educators. I learned so many things about early childhood education and what I am supposed to do as an early childhood educator starting from how stimulating that needs to be given to children, how to treat students with special needs, how to involve parents to collaborate in supporting

children's growth and development. I did meet many teachers from other schools. How we discuss and share our experiences and everything, I get insights and new invaluable experiences from them because these teachers came from different backgrounds and different cultures, so I can see and get a wider perspective from teachers who teach from lower to upper-middle-class social schools.

From this training, I put into practice the knowledge that I got and then wrote down my reflections from the start of this training - the process of practice in class and what changes I experienced. I experienced quite a big change. I became more passionate about cultivating educational values within myself and was motivated to become a teacher who is full of compassion, sees and hears my students more deeply, learns to be equal in providing educational services, supports their development and collaborates with their parents to achieve goals in child development.



Figure 1. Learning Activity with Students

There are several picture that capture a routine activity with students in discussing the material presented by gathering and sitting together on the mat to foster an intimate relationship between teacher and students. Once a week visiting a library to read and borrow some books. My students often ask me to read them some books everytime we are in the library. One of our learning activities in making mud, I prepared some soil, water, and shovels so that they can mix them together to make mud. At first, they felt disgusted with the wet soil because they thought it dirty but then I kept encouraging them to do the activity by touching the soil so they can feel the texture and make sure this is a fun activity, until then they enjoy the activity. We used to go outside to do our learning. Sometimes we go to our garden to do gardening, picking herbs then the children smell it, introduce them to different kinds of herbs we have or even process it into food ingredients or we just water the plants. There are cooking activity, I saw my students have a high curiosity by touching every ingredients provided and they are full of enthusiasm to try what I previously demonstrated. I always give them opportunities to try, I invite every child to participate. How I interpret and apply life skills to my students, even basic skills, to develop their ability.



Figure 2. Seminar Meeting with Parents

Seminar meeting with parents of students involving psychologists to raise awareness and provide knowledge to parents how sensory and motor stimulation benefits children's academic skills. These pictures that I attach, I use as data and my reflection on my values in education which I try to apply to my learning and teaching activities with my students. How I became more passionate about cultivating educational values within myself and was motivated to become a teacher who is full of compassion, sees and hears my students more deeply, learns to be equal in providing educational services, supports their development and collaborates with their parents to achieve goals in child development. I am a lifelong learner, so I can keep growing and I wish I can make a positive impact in the educational environment.

The Phenomenon Occurs

In this modern era where everything is accessible and things are easy nowadays, I find a lot of violence against children. One of the reasons is the lack of quality time and parental supervision, sexual violence through online often occurs to children. At least what I got through the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection says "Various forms of violence against children that occur in Indonesia are a challenge for us at the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and other related parties. Moreover, now, it does not only occur in the offline realm because it is undeniable that the online realm has also become one of the mediums of violence against children ranging from bullying to sexual violence. This challenge is further strengthened by the demands of children's needs to carry out various activities in the online realm" Said Nahar (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection). Based on data from the Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children (Simfoni PPA), it was recorded that in the period from January to November 2023 there were 15,120 cases of violence against children

with 12,158 female victims and 4,691 male victims, where cases of sexual violence ranked first in terms of the number of victims from 2019 to 2023. Nahar emphasized that protecting children in the online and digital realms needs to be a shared concern with the ease of access obtained without supervision, resulting in various consequences and children are vulnerable to becoming victims of online crimes. Forms of online crimes that lurk children such as cyberbullying, sextortion, scams, hoaxes, child grooming, pornography, to online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) are global and regional problems whose handling and eradication also require multi-party collaboration.

Empowerment

Empowerment has been defined as an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources; or a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). One of the things that has built my beliefs is that what I am currently doing is dealing with young children, when Dr. Susi Fitri, M.Si., Kons., my lecturer, encouraged me that I could still share the knowledge and everything I had through these children. Although not all and much of my knowledge, mostly the topics I am studying are the issues about feminism, teenagers issues and mental health. This encouragement has re-thinking about what I have been studying during college, not just about feminism, teenagers issues and mental health, Susi helped me remember, I did study child development, parenting, behavioural education and anything related to my work that helps me to review and learn all these issues again and again.

Claudia : “I do not think my background suits my current role so that I cannot apply my knowledge and everything to my young students, it is more applicable to adolescents as I become a school counselor.”

Susi : “Claudia, you do not have to wait until you become a school counselor to be able to apply your knowledge. By becoming a preschool teacher, you can do it too. Because, your job is to humanize humans.”

Claudia : “I think about what you said.”

Susi's words are still remembered and imprinted in me so that this has become a guideline and fostered patience in me during my process. She said “Humans are not like spinach that can be harvested in 3 months. Humans are teak trees. This means that humans need time to grow, you cannot rush it. Humans always need a transition to adjust”.

Hope

Immanuel Kant describes reasonable hope as a rational imperative, seeing it as a bridge between reason and existential questions that cannot be answered by experience ([Insole, 2016](#)). From my concerns and experiences, I finally gave rise to new thoughts and plans for my future rather than having to continue to be trapped and questioning the current situation. By becoming a preschool teacher, I have gained experience and increased my knowledge about early childhood and parenting where I also deal with their parents. In addition, with other fields that I am involved in regarding women's issues, I have become more in-depth in not only one field but more, which has given rise to my hopes and plans in the future to be part of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection. One of the small steps that I have taken is to participate in the selection of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Governor (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Deputy for Women's Rights Protection - Assistant Deputy for Women Victims of Violence) this year.

Addressing My Living Contradiction

I continue to experience myself as a living contradiction and value the response of my imagination in creating a future that resolves the contradiction in living more fully the values that I use to give meaning and purpose to my life ([Whitehead, 2019](#)). My first professional job in 2021 was as a media and campaign relation at an International NGO based in New York focusing on public health for 1 year because I felt this job was not suitable and I did not have a passion for this field until I planned to become a school counselor which was in line with my background then applied for jobs at several schools, but at that time the Covid pandemic conditions, where I needed a quick job to meet my needs. Until I got an interview call and was accepted as a preschool teacher which I was sure at that time, was an accident when I pressed the button. Long story short, entering the second year of being a preschool teacher, I continued to establish myself to become a school counselor. I continued to try and build my self-brand on LinkedIn and Instagram, highlighting my interests and expertise in the field of counseling and it worked. In December 2022 I was contacted via LinkedIn by one of the students from a well-known University in the city, asking me to be a speaker on the theme of education and that moment made me proud because I was paired with great speakers from within and outside the country.

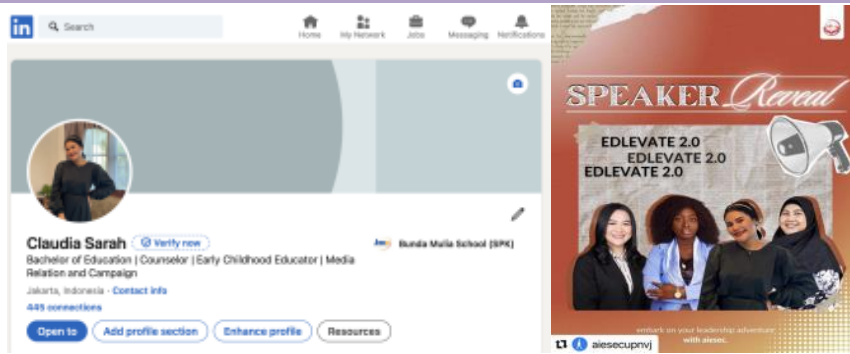


Figure 3. Seminar Meeting with Parents

The picture is my LinkedIn account where I keep updated my activities to catch networking. The next picture is a poster of mine as a speaker for students in University. Sometimes, I feel worried about people's judgment about me, even though I work full time as a preschool teacher, but the interests and skills that I often show are more related to guidance and counseling which are not connected to my role as a preschool teacher. However, my concern made me reflect more on myself that I have to focus on what I have now and maximize it as best as possible. Until I attended a preschool teacher capacity-building training to help strengthen my capacity so that I can function better and maximize my role as a preschool teacher as well as possible. I started to love my job as a preschool teacher in the second year of my career. It took time and process for me to be able to see more deeply into my little students, how they amazed me every day with all the self-exploration, development and uniqueness that each child has. Until finally, I got feedback from the coordinator and the principal for my good performance in class. I was very happy because even though I wanted another role, my ambition did not control me and made me selfish. I could still carry out my obligations in the role that I currently have properly.

I am lucky, in this school I have a coordinator and principal who support every development of the teachers. One of them is me. The coordinator noticed that I have a strong background in guidance and counseling and have a passion there. I often discuss with my coordinator who has a strong background in psychology and play therapy. She can see my potential and supports me to try the position as a school counselor that is needed by our school, the school where I work starts from preschool to high school levels. I was very happy when I was seriously offered this position because I never thought the path would be like this. Long story short, the coordinator helped with every process and the principal supported me in learning and developing my interests and potential until I got a probation letter to become a school counselor for junior high school - high school levels. I really appreciate their trust in supporting me, their trust is a motivation for me to continue studying and seriously plan my master's degrees, in a couple years at Melbourne University majoring in

Psychology and Mental Health.

My hope for the future is that I will get a permanent position as a school counselor at this school and can continue my Master's program in the next 2 years. As a school counselor, I want to help my teenage students solve the problems they are experiencing and become independent so that they can function optimally and have compassion for others.

Working on My Living Educational Theory

A living-educational-theory is a term coined by Whitehead (1989) for an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of social formations. I still remember the first time my lecturer, Dr. Susi Fitri, M.Si, Kons invited me to do a research activity in September 2023 about Living Educational Theory which turned out to be mentored directly by Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable. Long story short, during this learning process, I have been mentored for a year not only by Jack and Marie but also my beloved lecturers Dr. Susi Fitri, M.Si, Kons from State University of Jakarta and also Prof. Yuli Rahmawati, Ph.D. Living-Theory (Whitehead, 1989, 2011) is a form of self-study that is focused by the researcher researching questions of the form, 'how can I improve what I am doing?' This form of self-study is not navel gazing or egotistical. It is an ethically driven form of research where the educator recognises and takes responsibility for the contribution they make to the quality of the educational relationship, space and opportunities experienced by learners. Over the next 40 years Whitehead evolved Living-Theory research. It is educational and a self-study of a person's presence in the world that is generative and transformational in the process of researching to improve it.

Through the cooperative engagement with others, in the process of creating their living-theories, each researcher develops and offers, talents, expertise and knowledge that are recognised and valued (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2013). Research writing through living educational theory essentially is self-reflection because this research is about researching and discussing ourselves. How are values, principles, goals, and so on in line with what we do. During the process, this research really helped me to analyze and reflect more deeply on finding my values, values of life, and even educational values that I believe in. The mentoring provided helped me open my mind and knowledge wider and kill my excessive fear. Currently, my life is much better, many things have changed for the better within one year of running this project. Currently, I use my time and opportunities as best I can, enjoy every process, and continue to look for many ways so that I am no longer stuck or even lost.

CONCLUSION

I found values in life that I can apply through my role as a teacher to my students. During this one year, I reflected on the things I have and learned to consciously give meaning to what I have now and how this can be useful in helping people around me, especially my students, to be more empowered, their presence feels recognized and facilitated in reducing the obstacles they experience. Living educational theory helps me reflect to develop, try my best to focus only on what I currently have, and try my best through small steps that I can do to achieve bigger goals in the future. Through my educational value "To become a teacher who is full of compassion, sees and hears my students more deeply, learns to be equal in providing educational services, supports their development and collaborates with their parents to achieve goals in child development". Unconsciously, I am also cultivating these values within myself, with compassion, I can appreciate myself and what I have now to always care for so that it continues to grow, see and hear what I want to achieve, try to be fair and not selfish to balance carrying out my main role and what is my interest as best as possible, and continue to collaborate with many people and communities to support my self-development. My experience has shown me that whatever I want to achieve, no matter how big it is for me, will happen as long as I try and believe that it is in line with my values and what I want to contribute to my life as a school counselor while still being mindful of and living my role and what I have now. That is what I want to instill in my students, that no matter how big our dreams are and what we want to be in the future, the most important thing is to be mindful of the present and enjoy what we have now. Little by little, even though it is a small step to achieving our most desired goal, there will always be a way to achieve it. The future is a time that we cannot see yet, it could be that the time is still far from our sight, but it will be seen and become clearer when we continue moving to face and enjoy the present.

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