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## **A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Educational, Professional Development\*\***

### **Summary**

An argument for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development is presented. A living-educational-theory (a term coined by Whitehead by 1989) is the valid, values-laden and evidence-based explanation of the practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. An educational-practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research methodology as they research into their practice to understand and improve it and to generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theory. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. Examples are given of the difference adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach has made to improve educational and professional practice. The difference is focused on realising professional educational responsibilities to contribute to the knowledgebase of education and a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity. The difference is also grounded in practitioners accepting their educational responsibilities for living their values as fully as possible and for sharing the knowledge they are creating. Examples drawn from India, England, South Africa, Pakistan

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and Bangladesh serve to emphasise the global influence of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing, educational professional development.

**Keywords:** professional practitioner development, educational-research, living-educational-theory, Living Educational Theory Research, continuing professional development

Education is a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies. (UNESCO, 2016)

## Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. The contributors to organisations such as the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) and the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) bear witness to the global efforts by educators to making their contribution to creating a world in which humanity can flourish. This paper is focused on an approach to the continuing professional development of teachers in which teachers, as professionals realise their responsibility to research their practice to improve it, generate their evidence-based explanations of their educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing, and contribute the validated knowledge they create to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all.

In this paper we aim to present a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to continuing professional development in a way that can be helpful for teachers to:

- Recognise where they are already using action-reflection cycles and other research methods to improve what they are doing.
- Recognise the importance of focussing on values in working to improve their own practice as a professional.
- See the importance of researching into their own practice to understand, improve and explain it and creating and making public valid, values-based explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations they are working in and are part of.

- Formulate and act on a plan to extend their living-educational-theory approach to improving their continuing professional development programme for their own benefit and the benefit of us all.

## Living Educational Theory Research

Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner, self-study educational research. This is not to be confused with a form of psychological, psychotherapeutic study of self. The 'self' being studied in Living Educational Theory Research is that of a professional taking responsibility for their practice and for improving it, and for contributing to local, national and international academic, intellectual and scholarly discourses, which bring into being a world in which all Humanity flourishes.

An educational-practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research methodology as they research into their practice to understand and improve it and generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989a, 1989b, 2019a).

A living-educational-theory is the valid, values-laden explanation of the practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. The meanings of a practitioner's professional and educational values are clarified in the course of their research into questions such as, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' These humanitarian values form the explanatory principles in explanations of the practitioner's educational influence in learning, the standards by which they evaluate the effectiveness of their practice and the validity of their contributions to the growth of knowledge of their profession *and* to a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all.

In the first issue of the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* (EJOLTs) Whitehead (2008) wrote:

The approach outlined below is focused on a living theory<sup>1</sup> methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge from questions of the kind 'How do I improve what I am doing?' It also includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge. The new epistemology rests on a living logic of educational enquiry and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw,

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<sup>1</sup> A 'living-educational-theory' is often abbreviated to 'living theory' and 'Living Educational Theory Research' to 'Living Theory' in the literature.

1996) that include flows of life affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of Humanity.

The presentation emphasizes the importance of the uniqueness of each individual's living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) in improving practice and generating knowledge. It emphasizes the importance of individual creativity in contributing to improving practice and knowledge from within historical and cultural opportunities and constraints in the social contexts of the individual's life and work.

The web-based version of this presentation demonstrates the importance of local, national and international communicative collaborations for improving practice and generating knowledge in the context of globalizing communications. Through its multi-media representations of educational relationships and explanations of educational influence in learning it seeks to communicate new living standards of judgment. These standards are relationally-dynamic and grounded in both improving practice and generating knowledge. They express the life-affirming energy of individuals, cultures and the cosmos, with values and understandings that it is claimed carry hope for the future of humanity. (p. 103)

Some of the vocabulary associated with Living Educational Theory Research has been clarified in the editorial foreword of the June 2021 issue of EJOLTs:

1. Living Educational Theory (with upper case) refers to a lexical definition of meaning, which distinguishes it as a unique field of educational research activity.

1.1. Living Educational Theory research can be conceptualised as the process that a practitioner researcher engages in to create their own living-educational-theory (with lower case, hyphenated).

2.1. A Living Educational Theory researcher produces an account of their inquiry comprising descriptions and explanations, which together constitute an account of their living-educational-theory.

2.1.1. A living-educational-theory is an educational practitioner's descriptions and explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations – as they explore questions of the sort 'How do I improve what I'm doing in my educational practice?' (Laidlaw & Mellett, 2021, Appendix, pp. xv–xvi)

## **Continuing professional development**

In this paper the contribution to enhancing professionalism in education is focused on the clarification and use of humanitarian values that distinguish the educational responsibilities and educational influences of professional educators in improving their professional praxis and contributing to the knowledgebase of their profession. We understand the purpose of education

to be as Reiss and White (2013) put the purpose of school to be, to equip children, "...to lead a life that is personally flourishing, and to help others to do so, too" (p. 1). We contend that is the purpose not only of school but also the purpose of education for all ages. This dual focus of responsibilities on the flourishing of the individual and 'other' is also expressed by Kaukko et al. (2020) in their chapter, 'Education for a World Worth Living In', where they "take a view of education as being for the good for each person and for the good for humankind." These sentiments are echoed in the hallmarks that are commonly referred to as distinguishing characteristics of a professional practitioner. There can be confusion between the expectations of a practitioner as a member of a profession and their responsibilities as a *professional* practitioner, which has implications for what a practitioner includes (or is expected to include by their employer and the professional body to which they belong) in their programme of continuing professional development.

We contend that *professional* practitioners have responsibilities as a *professional*, to meet standards which includes holding them self to account with respect to their humane values. At the same time they have a responsibility to meet the standards of the professional body they belong to and those of their employer. Perhaps a key to understanding those responsibilities is to understand the purposes of the various 'standards' and to whom the practitioner is accountable. Members of a profession, such as teaching, are expected to act ethically and in the best interest of those they work with and for, *and* to develop practice that meets in targets set by their employer and by the government of the day. For example the Department of Education of England (DoE) stipulate:

Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils. (DoE Teachers' Standards, 2016, Preamble)

The standards by which 'education' is judged and the influence they have on the development of teachers as professionals are not dissimilar from those Zhang and Lui (2021) refer to in their paper, 'Re-professionalisation or de-professionalisation: how do Chinese high school teachers respond to the new professionalism?' In their abstract they indicated that "managerial professionalism strongly influence teachers: examination-oriented professionalism and quality-

oriented professionalism. Meanwhile, three patterns of teachers' reactions to externally imposed professionalism are identified: 'Why bother?', 'Struggling', and 'Meaningless'. The findings provoke further discussion of the potential influence of teachers' responses to the new professionalism and professional development." In their paper they stressed that:

Three key factors have been identified as being central to one's status as a professional: knowledge, autonomy, and responsibility (Hoyle and John 1995). Despite many challenges in relation to teachers' professionalism, these three factors remain important in examining the traditional conception of professionalism, as teachers have a specialised body of knowledge that is beyond the reach of laypeople and the autonomy to make their own judgements on behalf of clients' interests and public goods; moreover, it is vital that responsibility should be maintained during this process. However, traditional professionalism in teaching has come under challenge from the continued ascendancy of neo-liberal reforms in public fields (Anderson and Cohen 2015). Neo-liberal reforms essentially transfer managerial logic from the private to the public sector and create a new form of professionalism which is a markedly changed version of the former well-established professionalism. As a result, the new professionalism is a significant transfer of private-sector logic into the public sector and a replacement of the ethos of public service with the discipline of the market and performance-based external accountability (Evetts 2009a). (Zhang & Lui, 2021, p. 2)

What these approaches to professionalism seem to miss is the responsibility we each have as human beings for what we do. That includes responsibility for contributing to the educational development of the organisations and other social formations we are part of, as well as our responsibility as human beings for contributing to the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation that transcends time and place. What in effect they do is to foreground the purpose of education as training and knowledge transfer to prepare people for the job market. This defines the roles and responsibilities of Education institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities, and the nature of the 'education' to be 'delivered'.

There are many well-developed learning theories created by psychologists and neuroscientists, which educators can draw on, (such as 'cognitive load theory' the inspection arm of the English Department of Education base their work on). Theories created in other disciplines such as sociology, are also drawn on to improve craft and technical skills (Winch, 2013). For example, 'capacity for critical reflection' is added to extend a notion of what constitutes a professional educator:

As Winch et al (Ibid.) argue, what is missing from both the simplified craft view and the narrow technical view is the capacity for critical reflection: that is, the type of deeper insight that comes from interrogating one's practice and making explicit the assumptions and values that underpin it. In contrast to either view, the idea of the teacher as professional combines all three aspects of knowledge – practical, technical and theoretical – including knowledge derived through personal experience as well as research, analysis and critical reflection. (BERA-RSA Inquiry into Research and Teacher Education, 2014, p. 20)

However, this is still not much of a development from the definition of professionalism Zhang and Liu (2021) base their work on. Sachs (1999) working in a different culture and era, went a bit further with a notion of democratic professionalism. Such writers seem to be more concerned with teacher autonomy and collaboration with 'stakeholders' than about realising the principles of education as a life-long values-laden process of someone learning to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others.

The challenges teachers, as professional educators, have to face, whether in Australia, England, China, or other global contexts are those concerned with realising their professional responsibility as an educator to contribute to improving the quality of education for their pupils/students and for all. The key is to shift from teachers focussing on improving performance to enhancing educational influence in learning, which brings us to Living Educational Theory Research and professional educational practice.

In a Living Educational Theory Research approach to enhancing professionalism, professionals engage in inquiry and research to improve their own practice and that of others by contributing to the growth of their profession's knowledgebase and a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing educational, professional development is grounded in:

- The assumption that creating and making public accounts of living-educational-theories contributes to the flourishing of the humanity of individuals, collectives and Humanity as a global social formation that transcends time and place.
- We each have the capacity to generate valid values-laden explanations of our educational influences in learning as we explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

A professional educator's Living Educational Theory Research CPD programme includes, for example:

- Continuing study to extend their cognitive range and concern;
- Keeping up-to-date with practice knowledge;
- Generating and testing the validity of their claims to be contributing to improving the quality of the educational experiences, opportunities and relationships they and their employer are providing for learners;
- Seeking to make a contribution to the growth of global educational knowledge by making public valid accounts of the knowledge they generate through their values-laden professional practitioner self-study educational research;
- Not only drawing on the knowledgebase of their profession to improve their own praxis but to also contributing to the growth of a knowledgebase and academic, intellectual and scholarly discourses for the benefit of all;
- Not only acting in accord with the ethics and code of conduct of their professional body but to also contribute to improving them;
- Challenging and evolving their standards of professionalism and holding themselves to account by researching into their values-laden practice to understand, improve and explain it and generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theories;
- Contributing the educational knowledge generated in the process to a global educational knowledge-base for the flourishing of Humanity.

We believe teachers have a passion, as we do, for improving educational opportunities, experiences and relationship that contribute to the flourishing of an individual's humanity and the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation, which transcends time and place. We deliberately use the word 'flourishing' not 'surviving'. 'Flourishing' communicates a sense of well being of each and all human beings, who are living lives imbued with energy flowing, life-enhancing humanitarian values and living in harmony with a world they inhabit and are part of. That passion has been core to the questions that have driven the development of Huxtable's professional practices, for example, when working as an educational psychologist and now as a visiting research fellow with the University of Cumbria, and Whitehead's professional practices, for example, when working first as a secondary school science teacher, then as a university lecturer and researcher, and now as a visiting Professor with the University of Cumbria. It is continuously seeking to ask and answer questions such as, 'how can I improve what I am doing?' and 'how do I improve the process of education here?' that led Whitehead to develop Living Educational Theory Research.



A Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development (CPD) has been used to enhance professionalism in education and other fields of practice in diverse cultural contexts for over 30 years (Whitehead, 1989a, 2019a). This work is drawn on in this paper to:

- Present an argument for professionals adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to evolving their continuing educational, professional development programme.
- Provide illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years.
- Extend an invitation to teachers to:
  - Test our claim that adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach can make a significant difference to your ability as an educator and professional to improving your educational and professional practice and realising your professional educational responsibilities.
  - Contribute to the growth of local and global researching communities to bringing into being a world in which Humanity flourishes.

We outline some of the research methods developed and then go on to provide illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used by practitioners to enhance their professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts. We provide details to support our claim that Living Educational Theory Research is a well established, internationally recognised, academic research paradigm and form of professional development. We conclude the paper with an invitation to teachers to test our claim that adopting a Living Educational Theory research approach to your continuing professional development as a professional educator can make a significant difference to your ability realising your responsibilities as a professional educator and to join a global community of researchers engaged in values-led research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity.

### **The significance of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development**

Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to enhancing professionalism emphasises a view of professionalism that includes both

improving educational and professional practice and realising professional educational responsibilities (Harper et al., 2020) to contribute to the knowledgebase of education and to contribute to the educational learning of social formations; local, national and global which comprise the complex ecology within which we live and work.

At the heart of this approach to continuing professional development is an educators responsibility to ask, research and answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?' The central significance of this question is the inclusion of the 'I' of the professional educator. It is important to recognise that 'I' is not a concept in the sense of understanding a principle, such as the concept of a person. A Living Educational Theory Research approach includes the lived experience of an individual 'I' in a values-based explanation of an individual's educational influences in learning.

These are the explanations produced by the individual educator of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. Knowledge of education and educational knowledge are often confused. Knowledge of education comprises knowledge generated by researchers who are working within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of disciplines such as the philosophy, sociology, psychology and history of education. The importance of recognising this distinction can be appreciated by understanding a mistake that was made in the Disciplines Approach to Educational Theory in which it was held that this theory was constituted by the disciplines of the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. Applying this approach, to continuing professional development, led to the mistake of replacing the practical principles, used by educators to explain their educational influence, by the principles of the disciplines of education (Hirst, 1983, p. 18). Hence the importance of including the 'I' of the educator in explanations of their educational influences in learning.

Educational knowledge comprises knowledge generated by those who accept their responsibility to research their practice to improve it and offer valid, values-based, explanations of their educational influences in learning, in order to contribute to the flourishing of their own humanity, the flourishing of the humanity of others and the flourishing of Humanity. We are taking 'Humanity' to refer to a global social formation which transcends time and place. We repeat, we deliberately use the word 'flourishing' not 'surviving'. 'Flourishing' communicates a sense of well being of each and all human beings,

who are living lives imbued with energy flowing, life-enhancing humanitarian values, in harmony with a world they inhabit and are part of.

A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. Whitehead's writings from 1967–2021, which can be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>, and in the Living Educational Theory dissertations and doctorates, which can be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>, provide evidence to support this claim.

Improving educational practices at all levels of education necessitates employing well-qualified professional educators who can contribute to the growth of an educated citizenship of 2030 and beyond to realise a “humanistic vision of education and development” (Education 2030, Incheon Declaration, p. iii).

### **The theoretical framework**

We have already clarified the meaning of what constitutes a ‘living-educational-theory’, the term coined by Whitehead (1985) as a valid, values-laden explanation a researcher creates in the course of researching into their practice to improve it, of their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations of which they are a member. Those social formations are often only seen as those a person has an immediate and personal connection with such as the class, school, university they work in. What is not so often recognised is the contribution we each make, whether we intend to or not, to the functioning of other social formations such as political parties, governments and the cultures within which we live. What is also not often recognised is the contribution we each make to the flourishing or otherwise of us all, and those yet to be, by our very presence in the world. These contributions are explicated in the argument we make for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development.

The Framework of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development includes:

- A professional commitment to realise personal and professional life-enhancing values in practice and in generating valid contributions to an educational knowledgebase to bring into being a world in which Humanity

flourishes. (We are taking ‘Humanity’ to refer to a global social formation which transcends time and place.)

- The question, ‘How do I improve what I am doing in my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?’ can include the experience of oneself as a living contradiction in the sense of holding together the desire to live values of human flourishing with the experience of their negation.
- Methods for enhancing the validity of an individual’s living-educational-theory as their explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding.
- Creating an individual’s living-educational-theory, as an explanation of educational influence in learning, can include the integration of insights from theories developed in disciplines associated with education such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, politics, economics, leadership and management of education.

The theoretical framework in this paper provides an evidence-based argument to justify the claim that the contributions to the special section of *British Educational Research Journal* 14(6), (Biesta et al., 2021; Dominic et al., 2021; Hordern, 2021; Kelchtermans, 2021; Parsons, 2021; Takayama et al., 2021; Wyse et al., 2021) are not close enough to researching educational practice, that is, their own, to generate the valid explanations of educational influences in learning that are needed to constitute Educational Theory. The paper explains how the mistake in the Disciplines Approach to Education, recognised by Hirst (1983) in replacing the practical principles used by educators to explain their educational practices, by principles from the disciplines approach, can be rectified. This mistake was compounded by Whitty (2005) in his Presidential Address to BERA where he advocated a change in BERA’s name to the British Education Research Association.

### **The research questions**

The research questions focus on professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations. The questions addressed in this paper include:

- What are the consequences of professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations?
- Does adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional development enable professional educators to realize their responsibilities?

## Methods

These are some of the research that have emerged from Living Educational Theory Research:

### **Empathetic resonance as a research method developed by Whitehead**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a living-educational-theory is in the use of the meanings of embodied expressions of values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The meanings of values-laden explanatory principles, in much educational research are clarified and communicated in lexical definitions of meaning where the meanings of value-words are defined in relation to other words. Explanatory principles in a living-educational-theory are clarified and communicated as embodied expressions of meaning in the course of their emergence in practice. We first encountered the idea of empathetic resonance through the work of Sardello (2008). Our meaning of empathetic resonance is similar to that of Sardello, in that we focus on the feeling of an immediate presence of the other’s expression of values, through the digital visual data.

Sardello’s meaning, in his language of holy and soul, is influenced by his religious faith. Our humanistic commitments are influenced by flows of life-affirming energy that accompany the expression of values of human flourishing. Huxtable (2009) focused on the importance of empathetic resonance in response to Whitehead’s work.

What the method of empathetic resonance, with digital visual data, is designed to do, is to focus on the meanings of the expression of the embodied values of ourselves or the other as we move the cursor backwards and forwards along a digital video-clip until the moment of greatest resonance.

We can then check with the other that our recognition and description of the embodied value we are experiencing has validity in relation to the other's response.

We accept Popper's (1975) point that objectivity is grounded in inter-subjective criticism and that we can strengthen the objectivity of an explanation through subjecting the explanation to the mutual rational controls of critical discussion. We use validation groups of some 3–8 peers to provide such controls by responding to four questions that are related to Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity as one person seeks to be understood by another:

- How can I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- How can I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my claim to educational knowledge?
- How can I deepen and extend my understanding of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in my practice and explanations?
- How can I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing that I am living my values as fully as possible?

### **Spirals and living-interactive-posters as research methods developed by Mounter**

Spirals and living-interactive-posters have been developed by Mounter (2014). In her doctoral research, with the provisional title, 'A Living Educational Theory research approach to continual professional development in education: How am I contributing to enhancing the professional development of educational practitioners accepting educational responsibility for their Living Professionalism?', she developed Spirals and living-interactive-posters as research methods. In the introduction to a draft of her thesis she indicated that she perceives Living Educational Theory Research 'as a way of professional life' through research-led professional development. She created and offered a Living Educational Theory Research Master's programme, validated by Newman University, UK, which incorporates the use of both Spirals and living-interactive-posters and comprised by both a given curriculum and living curriculum. Mounter identifies a Master's 'given' curriculum as that composed by the knowledge, skills and attainment targets the university prescribe. She identifies a 'living' curriculum as that generated by the practitioner them self and is created as the practitioner engages with the given curriculum.

She created Spirals as a research method and as a 'living archive', which she incorporated into the Living Educational Theory Research Masters programme.

Mounter created Spirals as a research method and living archive to enable educational practitioners of any age to capture and continually engage with, data from their educational practice and research. Sections of Spirals were designed to enable educational practitioners reflection and reflexivity on passed experiences and learning to help them create new knowledge and improve their thinking and practice.

A Spirals journal is composed of a vast multi-media compilation of the educational practitioners data, on-going analysis, thoughts, new connections, memories, profound questions and conclusions, values and links.

Spirals was initially developed by Mounter with children in her class, in her role as a primary school teacher fulfilling her responsibilities as professional educator as she explains:

Over many years as a Living Theory teacher-researcher, I found myself in a social context co-creating a living-theory TASC methodology with my class. The process of this research looked at theories of learning and developed our understanding of the journey of education and learning. We, my class and I, wanted a space we could hold open for our learning and reflections: a space for reflection and reflexivity over time: a space to generate our own understandings and self-identity, giving us the energy of motivation. This space became Spirals. (Mounter, Huxtable, & Whitehead, 2019, p. 9)

Mounter went on to create Spirals for adults. For adult researchers she created sections: Dear Me (educational influences in my own learning) – for reflection on values, beliefs and practise in their role as an educational practitioner; Prism – for notes on national and other standards and work-life balance; MeSearch (educational influences in the learning of self and others) – for developing living-interactive-posters, multi-media data, ideas for research projects bringing threads together to explore; Projects (educational influences in social formations) – focused research projects and papers undertaken, questions researched, work published and conference workshops.

Mounter created 'living-interactive-posters' as a research method and as a form of Master's level assessment. Students create a multi-media academic presentation of their research in the form of an interactive poster to submit for assessment as part of the Masters:

The originality of Living-Interactive-Poster (LIP) lies in how it enables the researcher to clarify what constitutes the practice they want to research and the values that form their explanatory principles and standards of judgment. A Living-Interactive-Poster as a research method offers a challenge for the researcher to use multi-media data to produce a representation that provides a window into their research. A requirement of the Master's assessment is for students creating their poster to be part of an active Peer Validation Group. This enables challenge, ensures social validity and rigour as well as preparing students to defend their research. (Mounter, personal communication, 2020)

### **Living Theory TASC as a research method developed by Huxtable**

#### **Living Theory TASC:**

... comprises a synthesis of a Living Theory approach to action research (Whitehead, 1989a, 2012) and TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) developed by Belle Wallace (Wallace & Adams, 1993; Wallace, 2008) and incorporates multimedia narratives as a means of recognising, understanding and communicating energy-flowing values. (Huxtable, 2012, p. 223)

In bringing TASC and Living Educational Theory Research together, Huxtable (2012) sought to describe a research method that holds together the organic and systematic phases of educational research in a relationally dynamic multidimensional manner and offer it as an educational tool:

Coleman (ibid.) offers a metaphor of:

... 'theory as tool', which advances the idea that theory should function as a tool not as a goal, for organising disciplined inquiry (Marx, 1963), a tool that may come in different forms. (Huxtable, 2012, p. 67)

My living-theory is a tool in so far as it offers generative and transformational possibilities, which emerge and are clarified in the process of researching to improve my educational practice. I have in the process of evolving my living-theory praxis developed Living-Theory TASC to help me organise my disciplined, relationally dynamic and multidimensional, enquiry. As I employ this 'tool' I critically engage in the living-boundary between different worlds, with, for instance, psychological theories of learning and intelligence generated by academics and knowledge of practice generated in the classrooms. My purpose is to bring knowledge from different worlds/fields into the living-boundary between academic, practitioner and politician, and in



that space to work with it co-creatively to improve educational theory and practice. I am not concerned with asking, “Is this a ‘good’ psychological, neurological, sociological... theory?” or “Does this help me implement the latest government strategy?” Rather I am concerned with questions such as, “What do these ideas offer me as an educator researching to improve the educational experience of children and young people coming to know themselves and the person they wish to be?” and, “How does this theory help me extend or challenge my living-theory praxis?” (Huxtable, 2012, pp. 168–169).

## Contribution

In this paper we illustrate the implications for teachers, in Croatia, England, Pakistan, India, South Africa and Bangladesh, of taking professional responsibility for their practice as educators and educational practitioners. We have selected these teachers in these contexts to illustrate the global spread of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development. The cultural influences in each country are different but are similar in that they express a wide range of values that count towards human flourishing. The humanistic traditions in Europe and elsewhere are represented, as are Hindu and Islamic influences in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The African value and way of life of Ubuntu as a value of human flourishing is also recognised.

Each teacher has accepted their educational responsibility to use a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their continuing professional development. This involved making public, accounts of their living-educational-theory research, by creating and submitting papers to journals such as EJOLTs and making public their research accredited at Doctoral and Masters level.

These professional educators also present at various international conferences for professional educators and those concerned with developing and implementing local and national government and international policies and strategies. In doing so they contribute to systemic improvement in education for all, now, and as we have argued elsewhere, in 2030 and beyond.

Examples are given of the difference adopting Living Educational Theory Research approach has made to educators improving their educational and professional practice and realising their professional educational responsibilities to contribute to the knowledgebase of education.

Teachers face similar challenges presented by their employing Education institution and governments, irrespective of the time and place within which they are working. The following illustrate how some, as they engage in Living Educational Theory Research as continuing professional development, have addressed those challenges. We quote at length so the authentic voice of each educator can be heard.

Bognar and Zovko (2008) working in Croatia developed their 10-year-old pupils' ability to research to improve something important in their lives and support each other's research. The children presented their research to the class to share and test the validity of their knowledge claims. In the abstract to the paper they stressed that "In our inquiry the pupils determined their own challenges with the aim of improving something important in their own lives." (Bognar & Zovko, 2008, p. 1).

Mounter (2014, p. 14) in working in a rural English school as a head-teacher faced the challenge of having an educational influence in the learning of her staff and her school:

As a Head-teacher of a state funded English primary school I have a duty to implement government policy, and a personal and professional commitment to providing children with the best possible educational experience. There are times I, like many other educators nationally and internationally, experience tensions between these two drivers when my values are contradicted. This paper offers my living-theory (Whitehead, 1989), a description and values-based explanation of how I am working to resolve these contradictions and the educational influence I am having in my own learning, the learning of staff and children, and the learning of my school.

In a university in Pakistan, Panhwar (2020, p. 48) set about improving the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language and the process of education. In the abstract of the paper his pointed out:

I aim to find an accessible solution to the problem that the majority of students are not autonomous or motivated and do not actively engage with the learning process in these classes and, therefore, they fail to make satisfactory progress with their language learning. Through this inquiry, I narrate the processes and procedures, which were used to improve the situation with my students and colleagues. The findings come from two phases: the situational analysis and the intervention. I used a highly structured approach to group work, involving permanent groups and carefully selected cooperative learning activities and, hence, helped students to increase their motivation and engagement in English language support classes at the University level. From the overall inquiry and the use of Living Educational Theory research, I claim that a living-educational-theory may be a very effective methodological

approach for improving one's own academic practices and also student autonomy, motivation and engagement with ESL learning activities.

Parekh (2020, p. 21) as a head-teacher in a primary school in India transformed the education in her school and sought to have an educational influence in the learning of the social formation within which her school was situated:

I believe primary school teachers and students are the key people who can transform society. Additionally, as a teacher, I believe that a democratic and negotiated learning environment fosters accountability in a human being. Keeping this in mind, I had initiated a few educational projects with teachers and students in Lavad Primary School during the years 2015 to 2019. This paper describes how reflective practices enabled me to address the contradictions in my values and allowed me to put together creative solutions to avoid acts of autocracy. To influence my teachers and students towards transformation I tried to establish a 'culture of reflection' in the school environment. Those educational projects were designed in a manner in which teachers and students had to negotiate first and then absorb the values if they wished to. The purpose was to initiate democratic teaching and learning processes to empower teachers and students to be able to generate knowledge independently.

Gumede (2020) tackled the problems he faced as a head-teacher managing a rural South African school with few resources, "... It provides a narrative through which my living-educational-theory based on Ubuntu (humanity) and Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho (respect) was developed and applied in my management of a rural high school..." (p. 1).

Qutoshi (2016) researched to develop transformative teacher education and address the challenge of the culturally disempowering nature of teacher education and research practices in the context of Pakistan. The knowledge he created was recognised as making an original contribution to a global educational knowledgebase with the award of a doctorate by Kathmandu University:

My aim in this research was to identify alternative ways of addressing research problem which invoked me to generate a host of research questions that came up with five key emergent themes of my inquiry: 1) Dictating and communicating views of leadership; 2) Narrowly conceived traditional view of curriculum images; 3) Conventional and somehow learner-centered pedagogies; 4) Assessment as 'of learning and 'for' learning approaches; and 5) Objectivist and constraint pluralist research practices. (Abstract)

Tofail (2020) building on her doctoral research working in Bangladesh with:

... teachers against a backdrop of policy level introduction of communicative approach to English Language Teaching and dissatisfaction of different stakeholders, particularly teachers, with curricular reform that was not resulting in learners' 'increased proficiency'. A key reason typically given was 'teacher resistance'; teachers' perceived unwillingness to incorporate communicative principles in their teaching. Despite considerable consensus about the efficacy of teacher-research what practitioners from postcolonial communities actually say, think or believe about this and the influence on practice of teachers engaging in teacher-research has remained considerably under-reported. ... The process of initiating and facilitating collaborative research with colleagues led me to critically reflect on my own beliefs, practices and lived experiences as an ELT practitioner which, while largely shaping my embodied values has hitherto remained implicit. Through critically reflecting on my professional journey I clarify my previously unarticulated values and create my living-educational-theory. I conclude with how I am trying to enhance my educational influence in the learning of social formations, such as the private university I worked for and the Bangladesh government, with recommendations that emerged from my research. (p. 93)

## Summary and Conclusion

The research questions focused on professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations. We believe that this paper has answered the question and justified the claims that:

- What are the consequences of professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations?
- Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional enables professional educators to realize their responsibilities?

In this paper we tried to fulfil our aim of presenting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development in a way that helps teachers to recognise that:

- They are already using action-reflection cycles and other research methods to improve what they are doing.
- They can use their values, clarified as they research their educational practice to understand and improve it, to explain and judge their educational practice.

- In fulfilling their educational responsibility it is necessary to ask, research and answer questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing in my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?’ This research is focused on improving teachers practice to understand, improve and explain it. It involves teachers creating and making public valid, values-based explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations they are working in and are part of.
- By formulating and acting on a plan to extend teachers living-educational-theory approach to improving their continuing professional development programme they benefit themselves and us all.

We have presented an argument for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development. We have provided illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. We have provided details of where to access information about Living Educational Theory Research as a well-established internationally recognised academic paradigm and form of professional development for practitioner-researchers who want to improve their ability to realise their professional, educational responsibilities in practice.

We conclude with an invitation to teachers to test the validity of the following claim. We are claiming that by adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to your continuing professional development this will make a significant difference to your ability to realise your professional and educational responsibilities. These include contributing to the knowledgebase of education, the knowledgebase of your profession and to a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity.

We also invite teachers to extend their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. Teachers can do this by contributing to the growth and influence of a global community making a contribution to the flourishing of Humanity by creating and making public their living-poster and inviting others to do so too. Details can be found on <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>.

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