

Using a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Professional Learning and Education to Amplify Marginalised Voices

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Abstract

The focus is on the methods we use to bring the knowledge created by the marginalised voices of practitioner-researchers into the global knowledgebase of education. These marginalised voices, including our own, are amplified by making public the living-educational-theories of individual practitioner-researchers, with values of human flourishing including equity. These theories include acting locally and thinking globally with the values of human flourishing. Care is taken, through the use of validation processes, that stress the importance of the rational controls of critical discussion, to avoid the unjustified imposition of values by a powerful group on less powerful individuals and groups.

Introduction

We contextualised this research within our roles as a Visiting Research Fellow and Visiting Professor of Education at the University of Cumbria in the UK. Together we have over 90 years of professional engagement as educators and educational researchers with a focus on improving educational practice and with the generation and sharing of the educational knowledge of practitioner-researchers. We distinguish this knowledge in terms of what we call a living-educational-theory. This theory is an individual’s explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations.

Living Educational Theory Research refers to the research paradigm within which individuals generate their own living-educational-theory. We are concerned that our research contributes to enhancing professionalism of educational-practitioners. We take ‘education’ to refer to a life-long process of learning to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for self and others. This concern can be understood in terms of our analyses, of how professionalism of educational-practitioners can be enhanced, through making public the living-educational-theories of master and doctor educators (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016).

We have spent many years demonstrating the academic legitimacy of the knowledge-claims of individual professionals in generating their living-educational-theories. We are now focussed on contributing to the flourishing of local communities with values of human flourishing and to the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation, which transcends time and place. We are doing that by focussing on enhancing the global systemic influences of Living Educational Theory Research. Hence our interest in presenting our ideas on using a Living Educational Theory Research

approach to professional learning and education to amplify marginalised voices, to the 2021 Conference of the International Professional Development Association.

In this paper we:

1. Present an argument for identifying: i) whose voice is marginalised; ii) where; iii) by whom; iv) how, and; v) why, for improving human flourishing in local and global contexts with reference to values of equity as evaluative standards.
2. Summarise what constitutes a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education.
3. Detail: i) methods developed to bring the knowledge created by the marginalised voices of practitioner-researchers into the global knowledgebase of education and; ii) validation processes that stress the importance of the rational controls of critical discussion.
4. Illustrate how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education has been used to amplify marginalised voices so they contribute to human flourishing in: i) local; ii) national and; iii) international social formations, and iv) to the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation which transcends time and place.
5. Conclude with a discussion of the implications for a professional practitioner of using a Living Educational Theory Research approach for their own professional learning and education and for amplifying marginalised voices.

1. Marginalised voices:

We now provide an argument for identifying: i) whose voice is marginalised; ii) where; iii) by whom; iv) how, and; v) why, for improving human flourishing in local and global contexts with reference to values of equity as evaluative standards.

Humanity faces global problems, as never before. It is therefore of vital importance that we learn how to address inequities through professional learning and education and learn how to benefit from all voices rather than arbitrarily marginalise some within contemporary social formations.

In this paper we identify voices marginalised in social formations comprising organisations concerned with providing qualifications and educational opportunities and experiences, such as universities, colleges and schools, Politicians and financiers decide the purposes and funding of these social formations. The voices that are marginalised in those contexts are those of professional educational practitioners, such as lecturers, tutors, research supervisors and teachers. Those who have a vested political or financial interest in education establishments sometimes deliberately marginalise voices to maintain their power and control. They do so by various means such as controlling the standards by which resources are allocated and who are employed and in what capacity.

A core responsibility of professional educational practitioners employed in Education is to contribute to the educational learning of the organisation employing them and those who comprise the organisation, particularly those identified as students or pupils. Not all learning is educational as this story illustrates:

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

Dear Teacher,

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

Gas chambers built by *learned* engineers.

Children poisoned by *educated* physicians.

Infants killed by *trained* nurses.

Women and babies shot and burned by *high school* and *college* graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human. (Ginott, 1972, p.317)

So, it is important that the voices of professional educational practitioners are not marginalised in discussions about the purpose and funding of organisations that purport to be concerned with education.

Professional researchers, who are mainly employed by universities, dominate the academic, intellectual and scholarly discourses in those contexts and in organisations and associations concerned with the professional development and improving practice of those who work in Education. The research of the majority of these researchers can be seen to be grounded in one or more of the disciplines of education, such as the philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, economics, leadership, management and the politics of education. Education research (as distinguished from educational research, which we come to later) is grounded in the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of these well-established disciplines and forms and fields of knowledge. Many professional researchers have a vested personal interest in maintaining the status quo. As a consequence they can on occasions, deliberately or unwittingly, marginalise a voice that presents a challenge to their status, identity, sense of recognition and appreciation. They do so by using various strategies to mute, marginalise or remove voices from influential discourses. These strategies include dominating the contexts of such discourses, which include conferences and journals.

Because of the power of education researchers to determine what is published in journals of educational research, the voices and knowledges of practitioner-researchers are marginalised. This marginalisation is damaging the communication of educational theories that focus on improving human flourishing in local and global contexts with reference to values of equity as evaluative standards.

And then there are professional educational practitioners who marginalise their own voice for various reasons. Some marginalise their own voice for diverse personal reasons, such as fear of losing their employment, a lack of confidence, feelings of inferiority, 'imposter syndrome'. These are beyond the scope of this paper. Other reasons a practitioner may be marginalising their own voice can be because they lack the necessary skills and knowledge to make their contribution to local, national and international educational discourses for the flourishing of Humanity. This kind of marginalisation can be overcome by developing the necessary skills and knowledge. Another reason for this marginalisation can be, as in our case, that we need to clarify and communicate the meanings of the co-operative values that are necessary to enhance the systemic influence of Living Educational Theory Research. We do this ourselves in marginalising our own voices in relation to enhancing the systemic

influence of Living Educational Theory Research with values of human flourishing. This paper is part of our research to overcome this marginalisation. What we offer here is a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education to enable those professional educational practitioners who marginalise their own voices for similar reasons.

2. Living Educational Theory Research and living-educational-theories

We make a clear distinction between education and educational researcher. Education research is focused by gathering data and generating explanations from within the conceptual frameworks of the disciplines of education. Educational research is focused by generating valid, values-laden explanations of the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations. Whitehead (1989) coined the term ‘living-educational-theories for these explanations to distinguish them from those generated within the conceptual frameworks of the disciplines of education. This is not to say that knowledge generated through education research is not important. Such knowledge is critically and creatively engaged with and insights from these frameworks contribute to the generation of valid, evidence-based explanations of educational influence, in a living-educational-theory.

Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner self-study educational research. In summarising what constitutes a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education we focus on the nature of the living-educational-theories generated by practitioner-researchers as they ask, research and answer questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve my professional practice?’.

Valid and evidence-based explanations of educational influence constitute a living-educational-theory. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education includes the practitioner recognising where they are ‘a living contradiction’ (Whitehead 1989). They experience themselves as a living-contradiction when they find they are not living their values fully in practice. This experience usually stimulates the imagination of the practitioner to create ways to improve their practice and to develop and implement an action plan to improve matters. As they enact their plan they gather various data, such as video recordings, journal entries, emails, reports, so they can make a judgement of the effectiveness of their actions in terms of realising their values in practice. These values are clarified and evolved as they emerge through the research. They form the standards of judgment and explanatory principles used by the practitioner as they hold themselves to account to enhance their educational influence in the learning of a social formation and in the learning of individuals that comprise it, to contribute to bringing into being a more humane world.

Concerns, plans and actions are then modified in relation to the continual process of evaluation. The practitioner submits draft evidence-based explanations to a validation group to test and strengthen the validity of their explanation. This leads to the public sharing of the validated and evidence-based explanation of educational influences in learning, in accounts of living-educational-theory research.

Education is a values-laden practical activity. In judging something as educational we use values-judgements. Such judgements are necessary in judging educational changes in practice. We also use values-judgements in judging the validity of a

knowledge-claim as a living-educational-theory. In his seminar work on Ethics and Education Richard Peters (1966) explicated such values in terms of freedom, justice, respect, consideration of interests and worthwhile activities with the procedural principle of democracy. Each individual has their own unique constellation of values that they use to judge what they are doing as educational and the validity of their contributions to educational knowledge. We cannot overemphasise the importance of a practitioner clarifying, challenging and evolving their embodied values in the course of their research as they use these values to explain their educational influences and these values form the standards of judgement that are used to evaluate the validity of an explanation of educational influence.

3. Methods and validation processes

We now provide details of: i) methods developed to bring the knowledge created by the marginalised voices of practitioner-researchers into the global knowledgebase of education and; ii) validation processes that stress the importance of the rational controls of critical discussion.

The role of human experiences is foundational in the practitioner-researcher's exploration of a question of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice?' as they accept professional responsibility for their practice and contributing to a professional knowledgebase. The methods used are focused on the unique constellation of values that help the individual to recognise how they are defining their identity and recognising the implications for their practice. This process challenges the researcher to identify and address where they experience themselves as living a contradiction such as holding egalitarian values yet denying them in their practice by unwittingly marginalising themselves and/or others. These values are used as explanatory principles, in the continuing professional development of the practitioner-research in professional learning (Whitehead 2020).

Identifying the role of culture in professional learning and practitioner education in Living Educational Theory Research includes the researcher clarifying their embodied meaning of their educational responsibility to live values of human flourishing as fully as possible (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) and clarifying the socio-cultural, socio-historical and normative context of their practice and research. Multi-media narratives that use digital visual data as evidence in explanations of educational influence in professional learning and education, are used to highlight limitations in purely print-based communications. The limitations are focused on the communication of valid, evidence-based explanations of educational influences in professional learning and education across cultural contexts (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006a & b). Overcoming these limitations had included the generation of a new educational epistemology (Whitehead 2010).

We have created the methods of 'empathetic resonance with digital visual data', 'a living- educational-theory action reflection planner' and 'living-posters' to bring the knowledge created by the marginalised voices of practitioner-researchers into the global knowledgebase of education. We have provided above the live urls which provide access to more details of each of these methods.

The materials we use in developing a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to professional learning and education to amplify marginalised voices are the living-

educational-theories of practitioner-researchers as they explain their educational influences in their continuing professional development. This includes their inquiries into the educational influences of asking, researching and answering the question, 'How do I improve my professional practice?' The living-educational-theories are the data we use as evidence for our knowledge claims.

Living Educational Theory Research includes processes of validation that stress the importance of the rational controls of critical discussion (Popper, 1975, p.44) to avoid the unjustified, even if unintended, use of power by individuals and groups. Validation groups that draw insights from Habermas' (1976, pp. 2-3) four criteria of social validity in reaching mutual understanding. These criteria focus on enhancing the comprehensibility, the evidence, the sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and the authenticity of the explanations. This can also enhance the practitioner's confidence and competence to develop their voice as they make their contribution to the validation group. They have also tested the validity of their knowledge claims by submitting their degrees for accreditation and by submitting proposals and presentations to conferences and submitting papers to journals for peer review and publication.

4. Living Educational Theory Research and amplifying marginalised voices

We now offer some illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education has been used to amplify marginalised voices so they contribute to human flourishing in: i) local; ii) national and; iii) international social formations, and iv) to the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation which transcends time and place.

The original contribution to knowledge this paper makes includes details of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to enhancing professional learning and professionalism of those employed in 'Education' organisations. The originality of this research is in demonstrating how the methods used in Living Educational Theory Research, such as 'living-posters', 'living-theory action-reflection planner', and 'empathetic resonance with digital visual data', have been influential in enabling professional practitioner-researchers to clarify and communicate the meanings of their unique constellations of values. You can access the homepage of living-posters with guidelines on producing and submitting a poster from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>. You can access the living-theory action-reflection planner from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arlivingtheoryplanner.pdf>. You can access the method of empathetic resonance with digital visual data, as part of a new educational epistemology from http://www.actionresearch.gr/AR/ActionResearch_Vol1/Issue01_10_p89-109.pdf

These show how to use values as standards by which they judge improvement in their practice and their explanatory principles in explanations of their educational influences in their professional learning and in the learning of others and the learning of social formations they have an educational responsibility towards.

The results are focused on justifying what we claim to be an original contribution to educational knowledge in a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education. A necessary condition of this approach is that

individual practitioner-researchers generate and share a valid, evidence-based explanation of their educational influence in their continuing professional development as they ask, research and answer their question, 'How do I improve my professional practice?'

The results are presented in the following living-posters, papers in the Educational Journal of Living Theories, Living Educational Theory Research doctorates and conference presentations from Pakistan, Nepal, China, India, Malaysia, Canada, USA, UK, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa and Australia.

We draw on this evidence below to support our claims that using a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education can amplify the marginalised voices so they contribute to human flourishing in: i) local; ii) national and; iii) international social formations, and iv) to the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation which transcends time and place.

The originality of the contribution each professional practitioner-researcher below has made in the process of developing the confidence and competences required to amplify their voice with a value of equity is seen in their accounts of their living-educational-theory research. These accounts include values-based explanations that are formed by the relationally dynamic values that are used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence. These values are used as living standards of judgement in the educational epistemologies (Whitehead, 2010) of the contributions to educational knowledge being made through researching the individual's continuing professional development. These accounts provide evidence of the large-scale influence of using a Living Educational Theory Research to professional learning and education to amplify marginalised voices in diverse contexts such as:

Pakistan - Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi's, 2016 doctorate on - Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education in Pakistan. University of Kathmandu, Nepal. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/sadruddin.shtml>

Nepal - Parbati Dhungana. Accepting Educational Responsibility: Breaking hegemony of measurability over mutuality in the context of Nepal. A symposium presentation at the April 2021 Conference of the American Educational Research Association on Accepting Responsibility. Retrieved from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/parbati.pdf>

China – Moira Laidlaw. How Might We Enhance the Educational Value of our Research-base at the New University in Guyuan? Researching Stories for the Social Good. Inaugural Professorial Lecture by Moira Laidlaw Ningxia Teachers University, 13 June 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/china/mlinaugural.htm>

India - Swaroop Rawal. Making Magic: What Contribution Has a Living Educational Theory Approach Made Towards Helping Me to Improve the Quality of My Practice? EJOLTS 14(1); 1-25. Retrieved from <https://ejolts.net/node/371>

Malaysia – see the Living-Poster of the Malaysian Action Research Group at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/malaysiangp21.pdf>



Canada – Cathy Griffin and Jaqueline Delong. As Educators and Educational Researchers, What Contribution Has a Living Educational Theory Approach Made to Helping Us to Improve the Quality of Our Practice and Our Lives? EJOLTS 14(1); 26-49. Retrieved from <https://ejolts.net/node/372>

USA – Michelle Vaughan. Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in a USA/global context. Retrieved from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/michelle.pdf>

UK – Mark Potts' PhD. (2012). How can I Reconceptualise International Educational Partnerships as a Form of 'Living Citizenship'? Bath Spa University. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/markpotts.shtml>

The Republic of Ireland – Mairin Glenn, Mary Roche, Bernie Sullivan, Caitriona McDonagh have published numerous articles and influential books, such as: McDonagh, C., Roche, M., Sullivan, B. & Glenn, M. (2020, 2nd Edition). Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research: Routledge, and established NEARI (The Network of Educational Action Research in Ireland) and the Values based Practitioner Action Research Special Interest Group of ESAI (the Educational Studies Association of Ireland) – see their living-posters <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/neari21.pdf> and <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/vpar21.pdf>

South Africa, Elizabeth Wolvaardt's Doctoral Thesis, 'Over the conceptual horizon of public health: A living theory of teaching undergraduate medical students, 2013 University of Pretoria.' Retrieved from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/wolvaardtphd/Wolvaardtphd2013.pdf>

Australia - Phil Tattersall's Ph.D. (2011) Thesis, How am I generating a living theory of environmental activism with inclusionality? Graduating April 2013 from the University of Western Sydney. Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/tattersallphd/philtphd.pdf>

5. Discussion

This discussion is focused on the implications for a professional practitioner of using a Living Educational Theory Research approach for their own professional learning and education and for amplifying marginalised voices, including their own, where appropriate.

The focus in the paper has been on the methods that have been used to bring the knowledge created by practitioner-researchers into the global knowledgebase of education as a contribution to discourses for the flourishing of Humanity. Practitioner-researchers have been shown to amplify their voice and the voices of others with a value of equity as they have made public valid accounts of their living-educational-theory research. These accounts include descriptions and explanations of how they have acted locally while thinking globally with the values of human flourishing. The nature of the 'I' in the question, 'How do I improve my professional practice?' should not be understood as an egotistical or self-serving 'I'. Rather the 'I' should be understood as a relationally dynamic 'I' that is focused on living the values of human flourishing in as rational a way as possible.

As we focused on the marginalised voices we included our own. We pointed out that we have been marginalising our own voice as we research to enhance the systemic influence of Living Educational Theory Research with values of human flourishing. This marginalisation was due to a weakness in our clarification and communication of the co-operative values that are required to enhance this systemic influence. We are seeking to clarify and communicate these values as a way of amplifying these voices and overcoming their marginalisation. We are also stressing that we are focusing on the rationality of the voices we are amplifying in the sense that they are contributing to human flourishing. We resist the amplification of voices that are contributing to the negation of these values.

Significance to the Conference Strand on the role of human experiences, identities, and culture in professional learning and practitioner education.

The role of human experiences is foundational in the practitioner-researcher's exploration of a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. We stress the significance, for contributions to educational knowledge, of including 'I' as a living contradiction in explanations of educational influence. There is one epistemology, still dominant in many universities around the world, which accepts Aristotle's three laws of logic: The Law of Identity – everything is itself and not something else; The Law of Non-contradiction – two mutually exclusive statements

cannot be true simultaneously; The law of Excluded Middle – everything is either A or not-A. Dialecticians use different laws of logic. The three most important dialectical laws are: The Law of the Transformation of Quantity into Quality and Vice Versa; The Law of the Interpenetration of Opposites; The Law of the Negation of the Negation.

Our assertion, that you experience yourself as a living contradiction when you experience your values being negated in your practice, is open to refutation or acceptance from the ground of your experience. We are claiming that the experience of being a living contradiction stimulates our imagination to create possibilities in which the negation is overcome. Our desire to live our values as fully as possible motivates us to choose one possibility to act on and to gather data that will enable us to make an evidence-based judgement on the influence of our actions in living our values as fully as possible. We evaluate our actions and modify our concerns, ideas and actions in the light of our evaluations. This process of improving practice is similar to Dewey's pragmatism in practical problem solving and the Living Educational Theory Research action planner (see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arlivingtheoryplanner.pdf>)

The methods used are focused on the unique constellation of values that help to define the individual's identity. These values are used as explanatory principles, in the continuing professional development of the practitioner-research in professional learning (Whitehead 2020). The role of culture in professional learning and practitioner education in Living Educational Theory Research is that it includes an educational responsibility to live values of human flourishing as fully as possible (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021). Multi-media narratives that use digital visual data as evidence in explanations of educational influence in professional learning and education, are used to highlight limitations in purely print-based communications, for communicating valid, evidence-based explanations of educational influences in professional learning and education (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006a & b).

In our research, on enhancing the systemic educational influences of Living Educational Theory Research, we recognise the significance of cultural influences. The significance in terms of the role of culture in professional learning and practitioner education is grounded in Said's (1993, pp. xii-xiv) idea of culture. Said says that culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. The basis of the elevating element in Living Educational Theory Research is that the cultural influence includes an educational responsibility to live values of human flourishing as fully as possible and to share globally the educational knowledge that is created. This responsibility can be seen in the Educational Journal of Living Theories from its publication in 2008 to the latest issue in 2021. The statement from Huxtable (2021) as Chair of the editorial board of EJOLTs (the Educational Journal of Living Theories) exemplifies this responsibility:

This issue of EJOLTs offers a valuable resource for all who want to develop their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory research to realise their overarching aspiration of contributing to the flourishing of Humanity and helping others do so too. The June 2021 is a Special Issue; special for a number of reasons: It was created as a

collaborative effort by authors of the Editorial Foreword and the papers as they worked together to create an overview of:

- The enhancement of the quality of intellectual and scholarly, educational discourse
- The interest of EJOLTs to, and impact on, an international professional audience
- The contribution made to the development of knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory research.

The process whereby the content of this Special Issue was created by individual authors working cooperatively to make their unique contribution to a coherent whole is revealed. The individual papers of the issue provides illustrative examples of content of the journal that runs between two poles: at one end are the predominantly living-educational-theory accounts which are the educational practitioners' valid explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations; at the other end, critiques of and contributions to Living Educational Theory as a distinct research paradigm predominate. The appendix to the Editorial Foreword builds on a basic definition of Living Educational Theory research to clarify and extend its meaning in association with other words such as inquiry, researcher, account, etc. So much packed into just one issue – this is a very Special Issue to return to many, many times.

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