The role of professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining our futures together.

Marie Huxtable, University of Cumbria, UK.
Jack Whitehead, University of Cumbria, UK: North West University, SA.

Abstract

This research is grounded in our professional learning as professional educators and in the idea that professionalism in education includes an educational practitioner contributing to the knowledgebase of their profession and a global educational (values-laden) knowledgebase, by researching questions of the form, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?'. We illustrate the contribution professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research has made to cooperatively reimagining futures with values of human flourishing by drawing on individual practitioners' accounts of their Living Educational Theory Research. We have selected accounts which show the professional learning of the practitioner as they generate and share valid explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located and the implications for bringing into being a world with values of human flourishing. We bring into this paper our professional learning about community engagement practice developing as we work with colleagues in Nelson Mandela University and North West University in South Africa Living Educational Theory Research COMBER groups. We also bring into the paper our professional learning about research as continuing professional development in HE as we work with colleagues in the University of Cumbria Living Educational Theory Research CPD group and Alumnae of the University of Limerick in the Network Educational Action Research in the Republic of Ireland. Our account includes the clarification and communication of the relationally dynamic values of human flourishing that are used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The paper offers Living Educational Theory Research as a contribution to the professional learning of practitioners in diverse contexts working to reimagine our futures together with values of human flourishing. It concludes with an invitation to contribute to and benefit from the growth of a social movement developing professional practice and knowledge with values of human flourishing.

Introduction

Our professional learning began with our enquiries into our practice as professional educators asking questions of the form, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?' with a focus on enhancing our educational influence in the learning of students and colleagues with values of human flourishing. They developed into our masters enquiries (Whitehead, 1972; Huxtable, 2006), into our doctoral enquiries (Whitehead, 1999; Huxtable 2021) and then into our professional educational practices as global citizens (Whitehead, 2022; Huxtable 2022 a &b) asking questions of the form, 'How

do I improve my support for others and social formations with values of human flourishing to reimagine our futures together?' with a focus on contributing to the growth of local and global knowledge of communities learning to flourish together with humane values and helping others to do so too, as part of an interconnected world.

Each individual professional educational-practitioner embodies their own unique, evolving constellations of values of human flourishing that are dynamically related in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?'.
We recognise that our values develop in, and are influence by our experiences and what we make of our sociohistorical and sociocultural local contexts, such as family and neighbourhoods, and global contexts. Whitehead, for example, was born in 1944 during the Second World War when concentration camps such as Auschwitz existed as crimes against humanity. Huxtable grew up in a family, which was different to many of her peers living in a post war London suburb, as the NHS, quality education for all and public control over essentials of a social society, such as transport, communications and energy, were being developed.

We begin by highlighting the implications of distinguishing between education research and educational research, Living Educational Theory Research and a living-educational-theory and being a member of a profession and being professional. We then move on to an analysis of the role of professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining our futures together is grounded in self-studies of ourselves as professional educators. We include the idea that professionalism in education includes the educational practitioner's responsibility to research their practice to improve it and contribute the knowledge they generate as they do so to the knowledgebase of their profession and a global educational (values-laden) knowledgebase for the benefit of all and to help others do so too.

Our professional learning began with our enquiries into improving our practice as professional educators with a focus on enhancing the learning of students and colleagues with values of human flourishing and developed through our masters enquiries, and our doctoral and postdoctoral research. We are currently engaged in researching into our professional practices as global citizens supporting others and local and global social formations to research their practices to enhance learning with values of human flourishing, generate valid accounts of their Living Educational Theory Research and make public their knowledge for the benefit of all.

In reimagining our futures together, we draw: on Charles' (2007) doctoral work on 'How Can I Bring Ubuntu as a Living Standard of Judgement Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition?'; the work in global development supported by Moira Laidlaw in her supervision of doctoral programmes such as that of Ariana Briganti (2021) on a 'Living Theory of International Development' and in her tutoring of the MSc in Global Development at the Open University and; Mark Pott's research into being a global citizen in one's educational practice and professional learning. We then illustrate the role of professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining our futures together to enhance community engagement with colleagues in Higher Education in Nelson Mandela University, North West University, Durban University of

Technology and the University of the Free State in South Africa, the University of Cumbria and with Alumnae of Limerick University in the Republic of Ireland. This research includes learning to clarify and communicate the relationally dynamic values of human flourishing that form our explanatory principles in our explanations of educational influences in our own learning, the learning of colleagues and the social formations, which form the local, national and global context of the practices.

We conclude with an invitation to you to contribute to and benefit from the growth of a social movement developing professional practice and knowledge with values of human flourishing.

Education Research and Educational Research,

The disciplines approach to Educational Theory held that a theory of education was constituted by the philosophy, sociology, psychology and history of education; the 'disciplines of education'. These disciplines of education comprise knowledge created by researchers whose research is carried out within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education. Knowledge generated within the disciplines of education is critically and creatively engaged with by educational researchers to improve their practice. Professional educational-practitioners also use insights from the disciplines of education within their explanations, generated through their educational research. *Educational* research is carried out within educational, that is values-laden and values-informed, frameworks and methods of validation. The Discipline of Education comprises knowledge created by practitioners engaging in Educational Research, which generates valid, values and evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning.

Living Educational Theory Research and a living-educational-theory

A living-educational-theory is a term coined by Whitehead (1989a & b) for an individual's valid evidence and values based explanation of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. Living Educational Theory Research is a paradigmatic framework, which enables an educational researcher to recognise that they belong to a community of educational research. The paradigmatic framework does not provide an explanatory framework, as do the disciplines of education, from which a valid explanation of educational influence in learning can be derived.

Being a member of a profession and being professional.

We make a clear distinction between what it is to be a member of a profession (of educators) and to be professional; to be professional includes accepting responsibility for continually researching onto own practice to understand it and improve our educational influences in learning , generate valid values-laden explanations of our educational influences in learning and contributing the knowledge generated in the process to the growth of global knowledge. As global citizens we accept our responsibility to learn, life-long, to humanely live satisfying and socially productive and worthwhile lives and helping others do so too. As professional educational-practitioners and global citizens we accept our

responsibility to research into our practice to generate a valid explanation of our educational influence in our own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located, test the validity of our knowledge claims and contribute accounts of our living-educational-theories, to a global knowledgebase all can benefit from.

As professional educational-practitioners we are committed to submitting our evidence, values-based explanations to the mutual rational control of critical discussions (Popper, 1975, p. 44) within validation groups that submit the explanations to the questions:

- How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- How could I strengthen the evidence used to justify the validity of my explanation?
- How could I deepen and extend the sociocultural and sociohistorical understandings of their influence in my explanation?
- How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing that I am living my values as fully as possible.

These questions are related to Habermas' (1976, pp. 1-2) four criteria for judging the validity of communications.

Reimagining our futures together as professional practitioners and global citizens

The role of professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining our futures together has been influenced by the context in which our professional learning takes place. In our earlier work our professional learning in higher education was focused on our tutoring of master degree programmes and our supervision of doctoral programmes. In 2022 our professional learning is focused on our support for community-based educational research with values of human flourishing that include our educational responsibility for enhancing global citizenship.

In reimagining our futures together with an educational responsibility for enhancing global citizenshhip, we draw on Charles' (2007) doctoral work on 'How Can I Bring Ubuntu as a Living Standard of Judgement Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition?'. We identify with Nelson Mandela's description of the values of human flourishing in an Ubuntu way of being (Whitehead, 2011) as we recognise the importance of a relational way of being in 'I am because we are and we are because I am': a relationship communicated as an i~we relationship (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2006) where the unique contribution of each individual to the flourishing of local social formations and to Humanity, as a global social formation, which transcends time and place, is recognised and appreciated.

We also draw on the work in global development supported by Moira Laidlaw in her supervision of doctoral programmes such as that of Ariana Briganti (2021) on a 'Living Theory of International Development' and in her tutoring (Laidlaw, 2022) of the MSc in Global Development at the Open University:

The MSc in Global Development is an innovative, interdisciplinary and flexible course that equips you with the knowledge and skills to understand, investigate and respond to the key development issues of our times. You'll critically examine development theory, policy and practice across a range of contexts and you'll have the opportunity to explore six major issues: migration, socio-economic security, environmental sustainability, technological innovation, the global politics of development, and the politics of doing development. You'll also deepen your understanding of the issues of most interest to you by examining them through four cross-cutting challenges: conflict, governance, justice, and transformation. This will lay the foundation for undertaking your own independent research project on a development topic of your choice. Overall, the MSc will enable you to build in-depth knowledge and understanding of key development issues, ideas and debates as well as an advanced capacity for critical and reflexive thinking, independent study and research, and collective dialogue and action.

Key features of the course

- Builds an in-depth understanding of development theory, policy and practice.
- Enhances your ability to identify and analyse different forms of evidence, enabling you to intervene critically and confidently in development debates.
- Provides cutting-edge course materials that draw on the internationally recognised development teaching and research of our academics.

Equips you with the essential skills for a career in development and related areas. (See https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/qualifications/f86)

The role of professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining our futures together is being influenced by the global context in which our professional learning takes place. The importance of such publicly available Living Educational Theory Research accounts is that they make a cultural contribution in Said's (1993, p. xiii) sense:

…culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.

Including this focus on cultural influence, in making public individual living-educational-theories, serves to emphasise its importance in judging the effectiveness of the Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning for reimagining our futures together through their influences in contributing to cultures of educational inquiry (Delong, 2022).

For example, the consequences for citizens of countries rife with varying forms of political and economic turmoil, developing a civil, humane, society and helping others to do so too are yet to be seen. The ramifications for the world of violent conflict, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and planet wide disasters caused by, for example, climate change and plastic pollution, are also just beginning to be recognised. There is at least international

agreement that nations must learn how to reimagine futures together which mitigate the damage of human activities if the planet is to survive let alone thrive.

The analysis of Mark Pott's research (Huxtable, 2022b) illustrates the implications for an individual accepting their educational responsibility for being a global citizen taking account of these issues as they develop their professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining futures together:

Potts, M. (2020) How can I use my own values and my experience of schools in South Africa to influence my own education and the education of others? Educational Enquiry Masters module. Access from https://actionresearch.net/writings/module/mpsa.pdf

> ABSTRACT
> The focus of this project is my experience of South African education. A visit with a group of colleagues in February 2002 had great personal significance for me. It led to me examining my own educational values and the extent to which I fully live them out. It spurred me on to learn more and to influence others to act with me in establishing a link with a black township school. This is the story of my learning and the learning of others as I began the process of establishing the link.

Moving forward 12 years Mark completed his doctoral research:
Potts, M. (2012). How can I Reconceptualise International Educational Partnerships as a Form of 'Living Citizenship'? PhD thesis, University of Bath, UK
https://www.actionresearch.net/living/markpotts.shtml
This extract shows how as Mark has continued engaging in Living Educational Theory he creates and learns from multiple ways of collaborating to change him self, his communities and societies, for the common good.
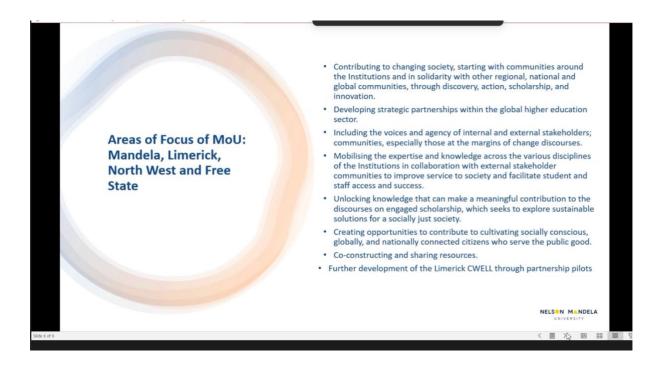
> The focus of the Salisbury High School/Nqabakazulu School partnership has been on the Zulu value of Ubuntu (humanity) to connect the participants as human beings. At the same time, there has been recognition of the differences between the participants and the need to correct the inequalities by focusing on the values of social justice and equal opportunities. This has been a key factor in the sustainability of the partnership. (pp. 290-291)

Moving forward 7 years Mark has continued to engage in Living Educational Theory Research as a professional educational practitioner after his career as a school teacher ended:

M. Potts, "How can I live my life as a living-global-citizen? From action research to political activism", *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, vol. 12, pp. 20-35, 2019. 347.pdf (425.94 KB) https://ejolts.net/node/347

> This paper narrates my post-doctoral journey as a Living Theory action researcher as I seek to continue to live out my values as a global citizen without the support of an academic environment. On leaving my role as a

full-time educator in a UK state school, the challenge for me was to continue being a Living Theory action researcher whilst engaging with real-world politics. My desire to continue to live out my values as a living-global-citizen led me to move from action research into political activism. The vote to leave the EU in June 2016 was the catalyst for me to become more active in politics. My belief in democracy was shaken and it led me to consider how I could enhance the democratic process through forms of deliberative democracy. This was the motivation for my involvement in the development of a Democracy Cafe and a Citizen's Jury in my home town of Salisbury, UK. I claim that both of these activities are examples of how I am living out my values as a living-global-citizen and a democrat, in order to enhance my own learning, the learning of others and to influence the social formations in which we are operating.

Our research into our professional, educational learning with values of human flourishing, also include our engagement on community-based educational research with colleagues in Higher Education in Nelson Mandela University, North West University, Durban University of Technology and the University of the Free State in South Africa, the University of Cumbria and with Alumnae of Limerick University in the Republic of Ireland. The context of these studies includes the areas of focus in the Memorandum of Understanding being considered at present by Nelson Mandela University, North West University, Limerick University and the University of the Free State:

This engagement includes the clarification and communication of the relationally dynamic values of human flourishing that we are using as explanatory principles in our explanations of our educational influences in learning as we focus on our community-based educational

research. In includes the use of these values in an epistemology for Living Educational Theory Research.

Evidence, of the effectiveness of The Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning, has already been shown in doctoral living-educational-theories in higher education from the UK, Republic of Ireland, Canada, the USA, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Australia, South Africa and China (See https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml)

Concluding…

As we seek to enhance the role of professional learning and Living Educational Theory Research in reimagining our futures together, we hope you will contribute by creating your living-poster to share what you are doing in your context and the practical improvements in your professional educational practice that you wish to research. The homepage of our present collection of living-posters, together with guidance on generating and sharing your own can be accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf. We hope this will help us to reimagine our futures together and sustain a dialogue in which we create and strengthen our community of Living Educational Theory researchers as we support each other in our inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?'

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