Enhancing Professionalism in Education Through Living Educational Theory Research

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Aim

The aim is to provide an evidence-based explanation of how a Living Educational Theory approach to continuing professional educational development is enhancing professionalism in education within European and other global contexts (Whitehead, 2021). The explanatory principles include the ontological values used by educators to give meaning and purpose to their lives in education (Delong, et al, 2021).

Background and Introduction

My interest in enhancing professionalism in education began in 1967 whilst on my initial teacher education programme as a trainee science teacher in the Department of Education in the University of Newcastle in the UK (Whitehead, 1967). It continued, following 6 years teaching science in London Comprehensive Schools between1967-73, and included the Academic Diploma Course in the philosophy and psychology of education at the Institute of Education at the University of London between 1968-70, together with the MA course in the psychology of education at the Institute between 1970-72. It then continued throughout my tenure as a Lecturer in Education at the University of Bath between 1973-2012 and continues to the present day into my contract as a Visiting Professor of Education of Education at the University of Cumbria from 2015-2024. The focus of my interest and educational research into enhancing professionalism has evolved over these 54 years.

It began in 1967 with my first science lesson at Langdon Park School when I could see that I was not communicating to my pupils. In the lesson I was aware I had to do better in helping my pupils to develop their understanding of scientific inquiry. I found myself asking, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. Over the past 54 I have been exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering this question in my professional practice. Whilst the question appears to be the same, the meanings of the questions and answers have been transformed over my life-time of research into professional development. Whilst there isn't space here to document all of this research, I have documented my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence my practice and understandings. You can access many of writings between 1967-2021 from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml .

In this introduction I want to highlight the following ideas on professionalism, Living Educational Theory Research and a living-educational-theory from a recent

presentation on 'Teachers as educational professionals contributing their living-educational-theories to the creation of the future' (Whitehead, 2021b):

i) Teachers as educational professionals

In their research on Teachers' Professionalism, Vijayalakshmi and Rajasekar (2019) conclude that the meanings are dynamic and influenced by political and social changes in their historical context. On the one hand they say that we cannot talk about an agreement on the conceptualization of the term 'teacher professionalism'. On the other hand they say that it could be interpreted as a professional work field that aims at achieving the highest standards in teacher that are based on knowledge, skill and values (615).

In my first study of 'The way to professionalism in education?' (Whitehead, 1967) I used Fischer and Thomas' (1965) idea that professionalism involved:

1. A long period of specialized training.
2. A broad range of autonomy for both the individual practitioners and for the occupational group as a whole.
3. An acceptance by the practitioners of broad personal responsibility for judgments made and acts performed within the scope of professional autonomy.
4. A comprehensive self-governing organization of practitioners. (p.325)

My only addition to these ideas on teachers' professionalism is that teachers, as educational professionals, have an educational responsibility to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) through exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' This educational responsibility includes the generation and sharing of their living-educational-theories as contributions to the professional knowledge-base of education.

ii) Living Educational Theory Research

I (Whitehead, 1985, 1989) proposed the idea of Living Educational Theory Research as a response to an error in the disciplines approach to educational theory. The disciplines approach claimed that educational theory was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. When researching my own educational practices as a science teacher with 11-18 year old students, I found that I could not produce a valid explanation for my educational influences in my own learning and in the learning of my students, from explanations derived from the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education, taken individually or in any combination. Hirst (1983), one of the original proponents of the disciplines approach, acknowledge an error in this approach. The error was in viewing the practical principles used by educators, such as myself, to explain their educational influences as "at best pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory would be replaced by principles with more fundamental, theoretical justification."

(p.18). Rather than replacing such practical principles, I argued that these principles could form the basis for an individual's 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 professional educational practice was located. I called these explanations, living-educational-theories and the research approach, a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development.

iii)   **Living-educational-theories**.

I put forward (Whitehead, 1989) the idea that individuals could generate their own living-educational-theories as explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations, to overcome the above error in the disciplines approach to educational theory. I want to emphasise that the rejection of the disciplines approach does not include rejecting insights from the disciplines of education in the generation and testing of a living-educational-theory. All of the Living Educational Theory Research doctorates, that have been awarded by different Universities around the world, have drawn extensively from insights in the disciplines (see https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml). The explanatory principles in a living-educational-theory are values-laden. This is because all educational practices are values-laden. It is a distinguishing feature of education that it is a values-laden practical activity. Judging something as educational, involves approving it. I understand that values can be contested. Hence, I focus on using and justifying values of human flourishing as explanatory principles in the explanations that educational professionals use to explain their educational influences in learning. I emphasise the importance of educational influences in learning, rather than just learning, because not all learning is educational. History provides us with many illustrations of where learning is associated with crimes against humanity.

Bearing these ideas in mind I shall now follow the headings below, suggested by the organisers of this conference, as I develop my ideas on enhancing professionalism in education through living educational theory research: scientific significance; theoretical framework; research questions; methods; contributions and findings.

Scientific significance
This significance is focused on the evidence that shows the academic legitimation, in higher education within European and global institutions, of the explanations of professional educators for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. The evidence is in the publicly available Living Educational Theory doctorates that have been accredited within these institutions (see https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml). Vested interests continue to promote education research rather than educational research in educational research associations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the British Educational Research Associations (BERA). In his Presidential Address to BERA Whitty argued for a change in name from the British Educational Research Association

to the British Education Research Association. The Executive Director of AERA has urged editors of AERA publications to use education research rather than educational research. The significance of Living Educational Theory Research is that it refuses to give priority to education research where explanations for the educational influences of individuals are deduced from the general explanatory frameworks of theories from the disciplines of education. The explanations in Living Educational Theory Research are generated by individuals as explanations 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. This is not to deny the value of using insights from the disciplines of education in the generation of an individual's living-educational-theory. It is however to deny that a valid explanation of an individual's educational influence in learning, can be deduced from the general explanatory framework of a discipline of education taken individually or in any combination.

Theoretical framework
Whilst the framework for this paper is given in the title, 'Enhancing Professionalism in Education Through Living Educational Theory Research', I want to emphasise the importance of drawing insights from a range of theories from the disciplines of education, in the generation of a living-educational-theory. For example I advocate the use of Critical Theory in focusing on the importance of cultural, political and economic influences in researching the implications of the educators' questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice in education?' (Whitehead et al, 2020). For example, Hall (2015) the co-holder of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, draws insights from Critical Theory is asking the following 'I' questions of himself:

> 1. How do I 'decolonize', 'deracialise,' demasculanise and degender my inherited 'intellectual spaces?'
>
> 2. How do I support the opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic, and that have exercised dominance over (perhaps have even suffocated) intellectual and scholarly thought and writing?
>
> 3. How do I contribute to the building of new academic cultures and, more widely, new inclusive institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity – whether class, gender, national, linguistic, religious, sexual orientation, epistemological or methodological in nature?
>
> 4. How do I become a part of creating the new architecture of knowledge that allows co- construction of knowledge between intellectuals in academia and intellectuals located in community settings? (Hall, 2015, p.12)

Whilst these questions demonstrate how a theoretical framework, such as Critical Theory, can inform the content of 'I' questions, it is a different matter to explore the implications of asking, researching and answering such questions in the generation of a living-educational-theory. On the homepage of the Educational Journal of Living Theories at https://ejolts.net/about you will see the heading, 'Values-led research for

systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of humanity.'   Using the theoretical framework of Living Educational Theory Research in enhancing professionalism in education requires the professional to contribute to the educational knowledge base with an 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 understandings. These explanations use values of human flourishing as explanatory principles.

One of the earlier criticisms of living-educational-theories was that they were anecdotal, merely subjective and lacked objectivity and validity. I advocate drawing on the following theoretical frameworks of Popper (1975) and Habermas (1976) to overcome these criticisms.

Popper's use of the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' uses the word 'objective' to indicate that scientific knowledge should be *justifiable*, independently of anybody's whim: 'If something is valid', he writes, 'for anybody in possession of his reason, then its grounds are objective and sufficient'. For Popper the objectivity of scientific statements lies in the fact that they can be inter-subjectively tested. Popper generalized this formulation for inter-subjective *testing* into the more general idea of inter-subjective *criticism*, or in other words, of the idea of mutual rational control by critical discussion." (Popper, 1975, p.44)

I use a modification of Habermas' theoretical framework on social validity below, to strengthen the validity of living-educational-theories:

> I shall develop the thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated (or redeemed: eislösen). Insofar as he wants to participate in a process of reaching understanding, he cannot avoid raising the following – and indeed precisely the following – validity claims. He claims to be:
>
> a. *Uttering* something understandably;
>
> b. Giving (the hearer) *something* to understand;
>
> c. Making *himself* thereby understandable; and
>
> d. Coming to an understanding *with another person*.
>
> The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression (*verständlich*) so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true (*wahr*) proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully (*wahrhaftig*) so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right (*richtig*) so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue

undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified. (Habermas, 1976, pp. 2-3)

To strengthen the validity of explanations of educational influences in learning I advocate submitting the explanations to the following critical questioning in validation groups of between 3-8 peers. The purpose of a validation group is to enhance the validity of explanations by subjecting them to the mutual rational control of critical discussion in responding to the questions:

i) How do I enhance the comprehensibility of my explanation of educational influences in learning?
ii) How do I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my explanations of educational influence in learning?
iii) How could I deepen or extend my sociohistorial and sociocultural understandings in my explanations of educational influences in learning?
iv) How do I enhance the authenticity of my explanation of educational influences in learning relation to the values I claim to hold?

Research questions
From a Living Educational Theory perspective, the research question of a professional educator is focused on exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering their questions of the type, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. Collingwood (1991) has emphasized the importance of the question:

> 'I began by observing that you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.' p.31)...
>
> Whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, depends on what question it was meant to answer; and any one who wishes to know whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, must first find out what question it was meant to answer (Collingwood, p. 39)

The grounding of the research question in an 'I' question concerned with improving practice and with generating a valid explanation of educational influence in learning has implications for the accountability of the practitioner-researcher. The implications are to live as fully as possible their values of human flourishing and to use these values as explanatory principles in their explanations of educational influence in learning.

The implications, for the explanations, include drawing insights from theoretical perspectives from philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, politics, leadership and management in education, in the generation of a living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2019).

The research question from a Living Educational Theory Research perspective differ from the research questions asked from within any of the above disciplines of

education. These later questions are formulated from within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of a discipline. The research is designed to contribute to the conceptual framework or methods of validation of a disciplined form of knowledge. In Living Educational Theory Research the research is designed to generate and to contribute a living-educational-theory to the professional knowledgebase of education.

In exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?', many methods can be used, including those that are useful from the disciplines of education and those that have been created for use in Living Educational Theory Research.

Methods

Many Living Educational Theory researchers have found useful the action-reflection cycles drawn from Action Research, in an inquiry of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. Action-reflection cycles usually involve the expression of practical concern when values are not being lived as fully as they could be; the use of imagination in generating possible ways forward and the choice of an action plan to act on; acting on the action plan and the gathering of data to enable to practitioner-researcher to make a judgement on the influence of their actions in relation to their values; evaluating the influence of their actions in relation to their actions; modifying their concerns, actions, data gathering and evaluations in taking their inquiry forward.

Living Educational Theory researchers go further than the application of a method. They use their methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001) in generating a valid explanation of their educational influences in learning.

> If our aim is to create conditions that facilitate methodological inventiveness, we need to ensure as far as possible that our pedagogical approaches match the message that we seek to communicate. More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage of practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care. Practitioner research methodologies are with us to serve professional practices. So what genuinely matters are the purposes of practice which the research seeks to serve, and the integrity with which the practitioner researcher makes methodological choices about ways of achieving those purposes. No methodology is, or should, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques. (p. 169)

I developed the method of empathetic resonance with digital visual data to clarify the meanings of the ontological values used by professional educators in the course of their emergence in practice, to explain their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of their students. I came across the idea of empathetic resonance in the writings of Sardello (2008) in which he describes empathetic resonance as the resonance of the individual soul coming into resonance with the Soul of the World. (p. 13)

> When we are within the presence of living Silence, which is being created every moment by the way we speak with someone, we feel an extraordinary fullness that makes it possible to be within the soul of another without harming the other person with our needs, desires, wants, and fantasies. It is a key to a holy relationship. (p.51)

I realise that my meaning of empathetic resonance with digital visual data is very different to Sardello's meaning. However I want to acknowledge the influence of Sardello's idea of the individual coming into resonance with the presence of another or of oneself.

Because the meanings of the expression of values of human flourishing, that are used as explanatory principles in a living-educational-theory, are embodied in what the practitioner-researchers is doing, I found it necessary to invent the method of empathetic resonance with digital visual data for clarifying the meanings of these values in the course of their emergence in practice. These meanings are then used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. I have previously presented, to the British Educational Research Association, details of the method of empathetic resonance with digital visual data in an analysis on the creation of an educational epistemology in the multi-media narratives of living educational theories and living theory methodologies. (Whitehead, 2010, pp. 7-9.)

Contribution and findings

One contribution to the above ideas on enhancing professionalism in education, through Living Educational Theory Research, has been analysed as teachers as educational professionals contribute their living-educational-theories to the creation of the future:

> This paper recognises that what counts as 'teacher professionalism' is influenced by cultural, political, economic and historical contexts. The approach to 'teacher professionalism', used in this paper, is grounded in the assumption that all teachers have the capacity to generate explanations of their educational influences in learning as they explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' These explanations are defined as living-educational-theories. The living-educational-theories of teachers, from different socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts, are presented to show how they are contributing to the creation of a future with life-affirming energy-flowing values of human flourishing. Digital visual data are used, with a method of empathetic resonance, to show how the embodied values of professional educators can be clarified and communicated. These values have been used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The living-posters from participants from 14 different countries in the 2020, 1st International Conference of Living Educational Theory researchers, will be used to demonstrate how living-educational-theories have been generated in different contexts. It will be shown how these living-educational-theories are contributing to a global social movement of global citizens that is contributing to the creation of a future that protects the jobs of professions in education with life-affirming, energy flowing values of human flourishing. (Whitehead, 2021b)

Another contribution is related to Living Educational Theory researchers' contributions to Wisdom-Inquiry and Wisdom Inquiry's contribution to Living Educational Theory Research (Whitehead, 2021c). Maxwell (2021) has argued that the world's crises can be related to the emphasise placed in Universities on knowledge-inquiry rather than on wisdom-inquiry. Wisdom-inquiry is focused on inquiries that are focused on making the world a better place to be, rather than the emphasise on knowledge-inquiry in generating knowledge. Living Educational Theory Research is offered as a form of both wisdom-inquiry and knowledge-inquiry in which educators contribute their living-educational-theories to the knowledgebase of education through living the values of human flourishing that contribute to wisdom-inquiry.

Summary of findings
Glenn (2021) has argued, from a perspective of Living Theory and self-study action research, that research undertaken in one's practice may benefit from a process of slowing down. Glenn outlines ideas around (i) personal awareness, (ii) intellectual awareness and (iii) relational awareness. I think that this summary of findings is consistent with Glenn's advocacy of 'slowing down' as this summary of findings embraces educational influences in my learning between 1967 to the present, in 2021. Whilst you can access most of my writings during this time from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml I shall highlight three transformations in my personal, intellectual and relational awareness through the following writings.

The first transformation in 1976

The first transformation moved from applying the models and theories of others in an explanation of an individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning, into the recognition of the capacities of individuals to generate their own explanations of these educational influences. This transformation was documented in two reports in 1976 on a project to improve learning with 11-14 mixed ability pupils in science lessons:

Whitehead, J. (1976a) An 11-14 Mixed Ability Project in Science: The Report on a local curriculum Development. DRAFT March 1976. Retrieved 26 August 2021 from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmaemarch1976all.pdf

Whitehead, J. (1976b) Improving Learning for 11-14 Year Olds in Mixed Ability Science Groups. Final Report August 1976. Retrieved 26 August 2021 from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ilmagall.pdf

In the draft report I explained the educational influences in learning of the teachers in terms of models of innovation, a change in the teaching and learning process and a model of evaluation:

INTERPRETATION OF THE PROJECT

As a synthesis of four models of innovation

a) Social Interaction/Diffusion
b) Research Development Dissemination
c) Problem Solving
d) Creativity

As a change in the teaching learning process

Formal Instruction- Informal Instruction- Discovery-Inquiry

As a model of evaluation

a)The democratic model of evaluation studies
b)A general research strategy
c)Norm, criterion and illuminative evaluation procedures(p.1)

In the final report the explanation of educational influences in learning was given in terms of the teachers own problems and possible solutions, their actions and evaluations. The explanation of educational influences included data from the pupils and teachers as they inquired into improving their own learning. This was my first explication of the use of action-reflections cycles in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?':

teachers problems.
IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT page 25
1) For models of curriculum innovation
2) For models of evaluation
3) For educational research
4) for in-service education. (p.3)

The second transformation 1988-2012

The first transformation focused on my understandings of the explanations for the educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social transformations that influenced practice and understandings. The second transformation focused on the academic legitimacy of the explanations generated by individuals to explain their own learning with my supervision of doctoral programmes in an individual's continuing professional development. My first successful supervisions of doctoral research were accredited by the University of Bath in 1988-89. Then, between1996-2012 some 32 successful doctoral supervisions were accredited. These can be accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml, with other Living Educational Theory doctorates that have now been accredited in different universities throughout the world. This second transformation is related to my continuing interest in contributing to the enhancement of professionalism in education:

Whitehead, J. & Huxtable, M. (2016) Creating a Profession of Educators with the living-theories of Master and Doctor Educators, Gifted Education International, 32(1) 6-25. The pre-publication contents can be accessed from http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/gei2015/jwmh.pdf

The third transformation 2000-2021

The third transformation involved a further shift in my personal, intellectual and relational awareness. The transformation involved an evolving understanding of my educational responsibilities as an educator and global citizen. My educational interests, whilst still including a commitment to enhance professional in education, have now broadened to include the commitment and scope of the Educational Journal of Living Theories on 'Values-led research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of humanity'. This transformation has been documented in the following two presentations:

Whitehead, J. (2020) Contributing to moving action research to activism with Living Theory research. Canadian Journal of Action Research, 20(3) 55-73. Retrieved on 26 August 2021 from https://journals.nipissingu.ca/index.php/cjar/article/view/467

Delong, J., Whitehead, J., Mishra, S., Vaughan, M. & Parbati Dhungana, P. (2021) Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in global contexts. Retrieved 26 August 2021 from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/aera21/2021aerasymposiumfull.pdf

Whilst this third transformation may appear to be moving away from the title of my presentation on enhancing professionalism in education through living educational theory research, I argue that we can enhance our professionalism in education through contributing to the educational learning of global citizens. I am focusing this contribution on enhancing values led research for systemic changes that contribute to the flourishing of humanity through the generation and sharing of living-educational-theories. From the 1st September 2021 my contract with the University of Cumbria as a Visiting Professor of Education has been extended for a further three years. I am looking forward to doing what I can to work and research collaboratively with colleagues at the University and beyond in enhancing the educational influences of learning with values of human flourishing.

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Whitehead, J. (2010) Creating An Educational Epistemology In The Multi-Media Narratives Of Living Educational Theories And Living Theory Methodologies. A paper presented at the Annual BERA Conference at the University of Warwick, 2nd September 2010. Retrieved 25 August 2021 from
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