A LIVING THEORY APPROACH TO THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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Abstract

This paper is focused on a Living Theory approach to the professional development of teachers from approximately the first five years of teaching until retirement around the age of 65. The choice of continuing professional development after some 5 years teaching is because it takes several years from the initial phase of teacher education to developing the skills, values and embodied of a professional educator. The paper is based on two assumptions. The first is that a professional educator is continuously seeking to improve their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of their pupils, students and others. The second assumption is that a professional educator has a responsibility to research their own practice and to contribute to the professional knowledge-base of education by generating and sharing their explanations of their educational influences in their own learning and in the learning of their pupils and/or students, and/or colleagues. The paper is organized in the five sections of: Questions for dialogue; Assumptions about the responsibilities of the educator; A Living Educational Theory Approach; Intellectual contexts of the presentation including a distinction between education research and educational research; Evidence supporting a Living Theory approach to enhancing professionalism in education.

1) **Contributing to indicative questions for dialogue provided by the organisers of the Conference on 'The teacher's identity and job profile as a professional'.**

In responding to these questions I am aware of the importance of the influence of context in any answer that one might give. Answers provided from a European context (Snoek, 2019; Snoek et al 2019; Snoek et al 2018) will differ from answers provided from other contexts such as an Asian context (Quotoshi, 2016). Even within a European context answers will differ as illustrated by differences between the UK and Finland (Stephens-Fulbrook, 2019). Whilst the answers are influenced by the context in which they are asked, there is an influence of globalization and economic rationality that is exerting a pressure on living as fully as possible the values of human flourishing that distinguish what learning counts as educational (see below). I am suggesting that any answer to the questions below will necessarily be influenced by individual and contextual responses to 'economic rationalism' where we have moved beyond the reductionism which leads all questions to be discussed as if they were economic ones (de-valuation) to a situation where moral questions are denied completely (de-moralisation) in a cult of economic inevitability (as if greed had nothing to do with it). (McTaggart, 1992, p. 50).

Questions:

- Which challenges do teachers have to face today and what are the developments expected for this profession in the near future?
- Is the work and role of teachers recognized with respect by society?
- Do teachers have the support required for the successful implementation of their work?
- Which is the role of teachers for linking education with society as well as with the labour market?
- What are the criteria and the job profile on the basis of which one chooses the profession of a teacher?

2) **Assumptions about the responsibilities of the educator**

I locate the responsibilities of the educator within the following principles that define the global teaching profession:

A teaching profession involves a period of specialized training.
It has a knowledge-base.
It has a set of ethical principles governing behavior.
It has a governing body with rules for entrance and dismissal.

My own view of professionalism in education (Whitehead & Huxtable 2016) includes a professional responsibility to explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my educational influences in my own learning and the

learning of others. It also includes making a contribution to the knowledge-base through generating and sharing explanations of educational influences in learning with values that carry hope for human flourishing. I refer to such explanations as living-educational-theories (see below) (Whitehead, 1989, 2018). As well as the traditional responsibility of an educator for extending the cognitive range and concern of learnings I am persuaded by the arguments of Reiss and White (2013) that schools should aim at equipping all students to lead a flourishing personal life and to help others to do so too.

3) A Living Educational Theory Approach

A living-educational-theory is 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 that influence practice and understanding (Whitehead, 1989). My idea of a living-educational-theory emerged as a response to an error in the disciplines approach to educational theory. The error was in the belief that the practical principles used by educators to explain their educational influences in their own learning and the learning of their pupils were at best pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that would be replaced in any rationally developed theory by principles with more theoretic justification (Hirst 1983, p.18). On recognizing this mistake I moved from my position as Head of a Science Department in a Comprehensive School in London, to a Lecturer in Education post at the University of Bath with the intention of generating a form of educational theory that could explain educational influences in learning with the practical principles used by professional educators to explain their educational influences. I coined the idea of a living-educational-theory for such explanations following an engagement with Ilyenkov's question:

> If any object is a living contradiction, what must the thought (statement about the object) be that expresses it? Ilyenkov (1977, p. 313)

Asking, researching and answering my question, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice as an educator?' included video-recording my classroom practice. On viewing the recordings I experienced myself as a living contradiction in the sense that I could see myself negating some of the values I claimed to hold. On experiencing myself as a living contradiction my imagination immediately began to formulate ways in which I could transcend the contradiction. I coined the idea of a living-educational-theory as the explanation I gave for my educational influences in my own learning and in the learning of my pupils. I later added the educational influences in the learning of social formations as I recognized the importance of social formations in both constraining and offering opportunities to improve my practice and my understandings.

Between 1996-2012 I focused on my supervision of the generation of individual living-educational-theories and their legitimation. You can access some 32 of these doctoral theses at https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml . In the early 2000s my research students encouraged me to conceptualise a Living Theory approach so that other researchers could see how they could belong to a Living Theory community. Hence, a Living Educational Theory

Approach refers to the conceptual understandings that place a living-educational-theory within the community of Living Theory researchers. My initial resistance to developing a conceptual understanding of a Living Theory approach was because of my early experience of the disciplines approach to Educational Theory. In this approach it was believed that explanations of the learning of individual **could be derived** from the conceptual frameworks of different disciplines. A Living Theory approach is not a framework from which the explanations an individual's educational influences in learning are deduced. I have come to believe in the value of developing a conceptual understanding of a Living Theory approach as it enables individual researchers to feel that they belong to a research community because their living-educational-theories, belong to a Living Theory approach that has no role in generating their own unique living-theory.

4) **Intellectual contexts of the presentation including a distinction between education and educational research.**

This focus is contextualized with ideas in two keynotes, presented at the Association of Teacher Education in Europe Conference 13-16 August 2019 at Bath Spa University with the theme, 'Teacher Education in a Changing Global Context', by Eloff (2019) and Snoek (2019). Following this contextualization I shall distinguish education research and educational research and explain the significance of this distinction for teacher education. The following is taken from my presentation to the British Educational Research Association on 'What Makes Educational Research Educational?' on the 11 September 2019 at the University of Manchester, UK - see: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwbera2019.pdf
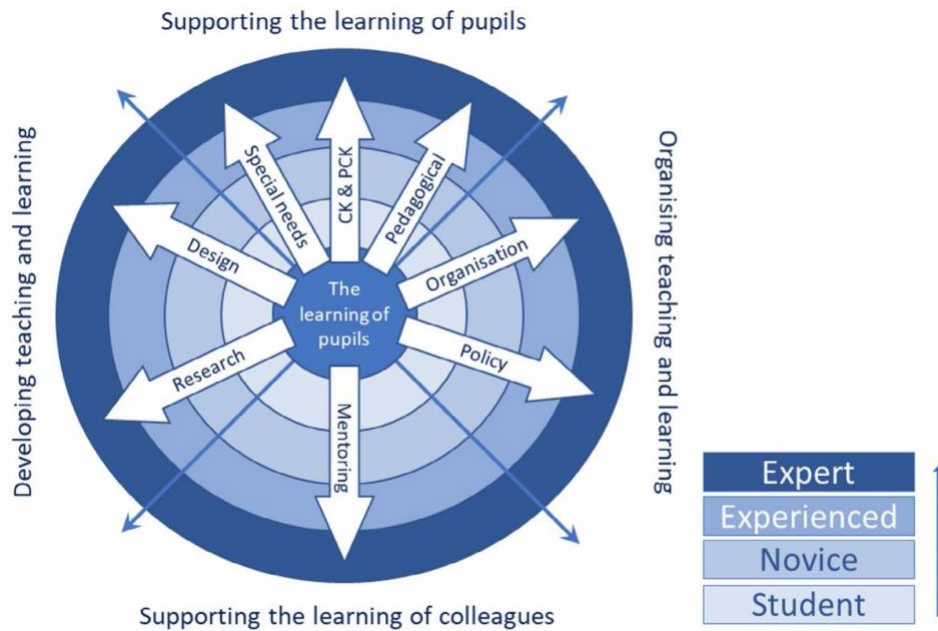
Eloff's (2019) keynote focused on 'Creating Ecosystems of Opportunity: How Teacher Education Can Support Sustainable Development'. Eloff positioned teacher education as key to addressing inequality and to achieve parity of educational outcomes for all. Eloff analysed three emerging networks as contributing to the creation of ecosystems of opportunity. The first was FRESH, an intersectoral framework and global partnership for promoting the educational success, health, and development of school-age children and adolescents through schools. This was launched in Dakar in April 2000, by UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank during the World Education Forum. The second as the African Deans of Education Forum (ADEF). This was launched in Nairobi in 2013 to bring an academic voice to international teacher education discourses. The third was the emerging Global Network of Deans of Education (GNDE). This has been established to facilitate cooperation and exchanges of information and knowledge among national and regional associations of deans of education as well as to convey the views of teacher educators to various global initiatives and UN agencies. (p. 23).

Whilst understanding the importance of such ecosystems of opportunity in supporting sustainable development with a focus on addressing inequality, the section below, on the contribution of research-based teacher professionalism in what makes educational research educational, highlights the importance of teachers and teacher educators researching their own practice as they explore the educational implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' to enhance the global professional knowledge-base of education. In expressing a responsibility of

educators in terms of addressing educational needs in the learning of pupils and students this Is not to deny the importance of addressing inequalities. It is to stress differences in engaging with ecologies of opportunities in the wider social networks identified by Eloff and expressing the responsibilities of the educator in engaging with educational influences in the learning of pupils and students.

Snoek's (2019) keynote focused on 'Reframing The Teacher Profession: Teacher Quality As A Dynamic Concept And Its Implication For Teacher Education' with four reflections. The first was that in Europe we use a rather static concept of teacher quality. The second was that this static understanding of teacher quality is partly due to the structure of the profession with isolated teachers in classrooms. The third was that this structure prevents teachers from having clear career perspectives, makes the profession unattractive for young people and creates problems for teachers to stay passionate in their profession. The fourth was that this static understanding of teacher quality, in teacher education, limits its focus to initial teacher education. Snoek stated that a much more important focus should be on the contribution of faculties and schools of education on the development of teachers during their careers. Snoek believes that teacher education needs a more dynamic understanding of the purpose of teacher education in terms of teacher development/teacher careers.

With his colleagues Snoek et al (2019) developed the following framework to support teacher growth and teachers' career development.

Opportunities for teacher development and teacher careers. *Source:* Snoek et al., 2018

Snoek (2019) explained that this framework has been used as a starting point for creating a shared language and understanding of the teacher profession and as a catalyst for dialogue between teachers and school leaders on professional growth. He claimed that it can contribute to a stronger common understanding of being a teacher as a dynamic profession and create a shared vocabulary to discuss and elaborate opportunities. He argued that the strength of the framework can be explained by the way it acts as a boundary object, inspiring mutual learning and dialogue

between different activity systems (of teachers, school leaders and teacher educators). He also acknowledges that the framework has yet to be formally evaluated in stating the belief, with his colleagues that:

> We believe that to strengthen the teacher profession, it is essential to have a wider understanding of teachers' work where teachers are experts in the teaching and learning of pupils and students, but also engage collaboratively in developing new pedagogies, organising teaching and learning and supporting and educating colleagues.

Whilst agreeing with Snoek that it is essential to have a wider understanding of teacher's work and to engage collaboratively in the way Snoek suggests, the section below offers an approach with a different emphasis. It emphasises the contribution of research-based teacher professionalism in what makes educational research educational. The approach is focused on a form of research-based professionalism in which teachers and teacher educators contribute to the global professional knowledge-base of education with their explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence their practice and understandings. I think it worth stressing that Snoek acknowledges that the above framework has yet to be formally evaluated.

I now want to make a distinction between education research and educational research and explain the significance of the distinction for teacher education. I am taking education research to be research conducted from within forms and fields of knowledge such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, politics, management and leadership of education and that generates explanations from within these forms and fields of knowledge.

I am taking educational research to include the responsibility of the researcher to generate explanations of the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. I have defined such explanations as living-educational-theories. They draw insights from education research without being subsumed within any explanation deduced from a conceptual framework of an education researcher.

5) **Evidence supporting a Living Theory approach to enhancing professionalism in education**

Whitehead and Huxtable (2016) have presented a detailed argument for justifying a Living Theory approach to enhancing professionalism in education.
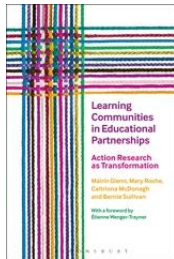
You can access the evidence that supports this approach to enhancing professionalism in the Living Theory doctorates legitimated at different Universities throughout the world at: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml . These include doctorates on the study of teacher education in the UK, Pakistan, Canada, South Africa and the Republic of Ireland. This approach to enhancing professionalism can also be accessed in the living-theories of master educators at: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml . The most impressive developments of this approach are in the Values Led Leadership Master Programme

developed by Joy Mounter at the Learning Institute in Cornwall, UK and legitimated by Newman University (see https://www.learninginstitute.co.uk/mavalues) and the publications from members of the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (McDonagh, Roche, Sullivan & Glenn):
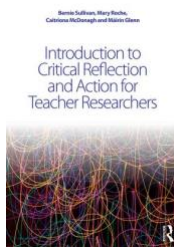
Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research: A Teacher's Guide to Professional Development, 2nd Edition

By **Caitriona McDonagh**, **Mary Roche**, **Bernie Sullivan**, **Máirín Glenn**

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Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers
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If you wish to contribute to a Living Theory approach to your own professional development and to contribute to the professional knowledge-base of education you will explore the implications of asking, researching and answering your own questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' You will generate and share an explanation of your educational influences in learning using the values you use to give meaning and purpose to your life as explanatory principles. Through joining the community of Living Theory researchers you will be enhancing the flow of values and understandings that are carrying hope for human flourishing.

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