

## **Reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research (LETR)**

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A presentation to the International Professional Development Association Conference on November 2022 at the University of Aston in the UK.

### **Abstract**

**Context:** The author has presented workshops on a LETR approach to continuing professional development in higher education in Thailand, Canada, the USA, South Africa, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Kenya and South America and supervised over 30 Living Educational Theory doctorates. The unique constellation of values used by participants in the workshops and doctorates, to give meaning and purpose to their lives, are used as the explanatory principles and standards of judgment in the explanations of educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. The explanations include insights from the global policy statements from UNESCO (2022).

**Focus:** This is on an analysis of the effectiveness of the LETR approach to professional learning for reimagining our futures together. Data and evidence include over 50 doctoral living-educational-theories legitimated in the Universities around the world. It includes the collaborations and community-based inquiries of practitioner-researchers in universities in South Africa and the UK.

**Originality:** the idea that professionalism in education includes educational-practitioners fulfilling their educational responsibility to generate and share their living-educational-theories as contributions to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase'.

**Significance:** This is in the evidence that contributors to IPDA can reimagining our professional futures together with a Living Educational Theory Research approach to our professional development as we generate and share our explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which our practice is located.

### **Introduction**

**Context:** The context is defined by my professional practice as: an educator and educational researcher as a school science teacher, 1967-1973; as a lecturer in education, 1973-2012; as a visiting professor of education, 2013-present; as an extraordinary professor of community-based educational research, 2022-2025. In these contexts I have researched and published (See <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>) my valid, evidence and values-laden explanations of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which my practice is located.

I have presented workshops on a LETR approach to continuing professional development in higher education in Thailand, Canada, the USA, South Africa, South America, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Kenya and South America. My learnings in these workshops have helped me to develop my understanding and value of being a global citizen with an evolving awareness of cultural differences and influences. These influences include the value of an Ubuntu way of being from Africa and a Satvic understanding from Hindu cultures. My explanations include insights from the global policy statements from UNESCO (2022). They connect with the areas of focus in the memorandum of understanding below being considered by Nelson Mandela University, the University of Limerick, North West University and the University of the Free State. The explanations also connect with my work with colleagues at the University of Cumbria in the UK and in Durban University of Technology in South Africa.

**Focus:** This is on an analysis of the effectiveness of the LETR approach to professional learning for reimagining our futures together. It includes the collaborations and community-based inquiries of

practitioner-researchers in universities in South Africa and the UK, together with contributions to two symposia at the 2021 and 2022 American Educational Research Association on educational responsibility and equity (DeLong et al. 2021 & 2022) and a symposium at the 2022 Conference of the Collaborative Action Research Network on 'Changing Lives through Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry' (DeLong, et al. 2022). It includes data and evidence from over 50 doctoral living-educational-theories legitimated in the Universities around the world and includes the values of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition from an Ubuntu way of being and researching (Charles, 2007).

**Originality:** This includes the idea that professionalism in education requires educational-practitioners to fulfil their educational responsibility to generate and share their living-educational-theories as contributions to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase. This global educational knowledgebase requires the recognition of, and engagement with, the ontological values that distinguish differences and similarities in sociohistorical and sociocultural influences. The development of this global educational knowledgebase includes the creation and sharing of the living-posters of practitioner-researchers (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>) and the sharing of their living-educational-theories (<https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> ).

**Significance:** This is focused on reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research. It involves an engagement with the conference strands of:

- Disruptions and emerging transformations.
- Pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity.
- The transformative work of practitioner educators.
- Education across different times and spaces.

It also involves responding to the key questions of:

- How do we develop the capabilities for our communities to adapt to and mitigate the challenges of our times?
- How might we promote civic discourse and freedom of expression through professional learning and education?
- What role does professional learning have in tackling disadvantage, inequality, and promoting the long-term well-being of individuals and communities?
- What role does professional learning have in promoting sustainability, peace, justice and strong institutions?
- What can we learn from innovative approaches to engagement and learning across communities and societies?

The significance is also related to the evidence that contributors to International Professional Development are reimagining our professional futures together with a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development as we generate and share our explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which our practice is located.

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**Context:** The context of my research, into reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research, has changed continuously over the course of my professional engagement with education between 1967-2022. Initially it was defined by my professional practice as an educator and educational researcher in my school science teaching between 1967-1973. It changed with my move, as a Lecturer in Education at the University of Bath in the UK between 1973-2012. It then evolved as a Visiting Professor of Education at the University of Cumbria between 2013-present and as an Extraordinary Professor of Community-based Educational Research, at North West University in South Africa, with a contract between 2022-2025. In these contexts I have continuously researched and published (See <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml> ) my valid,

evidence and values-laden explanations of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which my practice is located.

Through presenting workshops, on a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development in higher education, in Thailand, Canada, the USA, South Africa, South America, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Kenya and South America, I have continuously reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research. Reflections on my responses to these workshops continues to help me to clarify and communicate my value of being a global citizen with an evolving awareness of cultural differences and influences. These influences include the value of an Ubuntu way of being from Africa (Charles, 2007) and a Satvic understanding from Hindu cultures (Dhungana, 2022):



Figure 1: Ardhanarishwor, a Metaphor of a Harmonious Equitable space

*Ardhanarishwor* is a constellation of *Purusha* (e.g. Shiva) and *Prakriti* (e.g. Shakti) who appears as an inclusive, integrated, integral, whole in parts and parts in whole, harmonious one-like whole. According to Mishra (2017) *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are beyond our psychical perception as they are our qualities of consciousness as logicity and intuitiveness. When these qualities are equitable, in Yoga or union, I experienced harmony. Perhaps, when my logical mind and intuitive heart were equally used, then they were balanced and I experienced harmony. Here, I sensed that logicity and intuitiveness and explanatory principles of my living values, harmony and equity.

In reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research I am also extending my cognitive range and concerns in being a global citizen with insights from the global policy statements from UNESCO (2022):

#### GLOBAL CONTEXT FROM UNESCO

- *“During the course of our discussions, specific recommendations arose for concrete actions HEIs can take to overcome the barriers to embracing the 2030 Agenda, covering themes of sustainability, equity and inclusion, and global partnerships, among others. Among them we wish to highlight the following: “*
- This is followed by 16 recommendations on pages 85-87.

UNESCO (2022) Knowledge-driven actions: transforming higher education for global sustainability. UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380519>

#### WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE UNESCO REPORT?

What is needed, to enhance the flow of values of human flourishing, is an individual and collective response to questions of the kind, ‘how do I improve what I am doing with values of human flourishing?’ What is needed is for each one of us to express our educational responsibility to research our own educational practice within our communities and to share the knowledge we generate in enhancing the flow of values of human flourishing.

What is missing is ‘Using a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Enhance Community Based Educational Research (COMBER)’ (Whitehead, 2022)

In reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research I am also connecting with the areas of focus in the memorandum of understanding being considered by Nelson Mandela University, the University of Limerick, North West University and the University of the Free State.

**Areas of Focus of MoU:  
Mandela, Limerick,  
North West and Free  
State**

- Contributing to changing society, starting with communities around the Institutions and in solidarity with other regional, national and global communities, through discovery, action, scholarship, and innovation.
- Developing strategic partnerships within the global higher education sector.
- Including the voices and agency of internal and external stakeholders; communities, especially those at the margins of change discourses.
- Mobilising the expertise and knowledge across the various disciplines of the Institutions in collaboration with external stakeholder communities to improve service to society and facilitate student and staff access and success.
- Unlocking knowledge that can make a meaningful contribution to the discourses on engaged scholarship, which seeks to explore sustainable solutions for a socially just society.
- Creating opportunities to contribute to cultivating socially conscious, globally, and nationally connected citizens who serve the public good.
- Co-constructing and sharing resources.
- Further development of the Limerick CWELL through partnership pilots

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My explanations of reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research also connect with my work with colleagues at the University of Cumbria in the UK and in Durban University of Technology in South Africa (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2022). You can access the living-posters of these participants from the homepage of living-posters at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>

**Focus:** This is focused on an evidence and values-based analysis of the effectiveness of the Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning for reimagining our futures together. As I have described in the context above this includes the collaborations and community-based inquiries of practitioner-researchers in universities in South Africa and the UK. It also includes contributions to two symposia at the 2021 and 2022 American Educational Research Association (AERA) on 'Educational Responsibility' and on 'Equity', respectively (DeLong et al., 2021 & 2022) and a symposium at the 2022 Conference of the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) on 'Changing Lives through Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research in Cultures of Inquiry' (DeLong, et al. 2022). The values-based analysis includes an engagement with a Western epistemological emphasis on validation with the use of digital visual data in clarifying and communicating meanings of embodied values in educational practice. It includes the values, from African cultures of an Ubuntu way of being in 'I am because we are' and 'We are because I am' (Charles, 2007). It includes values drawn from Eastern cultures that are influenced by Tandric understandings and practices (Dhungana, 2022).

The evidence and values-based analysis of the effectiveness of the Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning for reimagining our futures together also includes data from over 50 doctoral living-educational-theories legitimated in the Universities around the world (see <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>) and includes the values of societal reidentification and guiltless recognition from an Ubuntu way of being and researching (Charles, 2007). 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 by 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.

**Originality:** This includes the idea that professionalism in education requires educational-practitioners to fulfil their educational responsibility to generate and share their living-educational-theories as contributions to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase'. This global educational knowledgebase requires the recognition of, and engagement with, the ontological values that distinguish differences and similarities in sociohistorical and sociocultural influences. The development of this global educational knowledgebase, includes the creation and sharing of the living-posters of practitioner-researchers (<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>) and the sharing of their living-educational-theories (<https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>). This making public, of living-educational-theories, fulfils a responsibility of a researcher to open their research accounts to public criticism in order to test the validity of the claims to knowledge being made. Making public, academically accredited living-educational-theories also enables other individuals to use insights from each other's theories in enhancing the effectiveness of the Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning for reimagining our futures together. Integrating insights from each other's living-educational-theories also enables the explicit acknowledge of how we are reimagining our futures together.

**Significance:** This is focused on reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research. It involves an engagement with the conference strands of;

- Disruptions and emerging transformations

In a presentation on 'Contributing to Changing Lives through Action and Living Educational Theory research in Cultures of Inquiry', to the 2022 Collaborative Action Research Network Conference (Whitehead 2022), I presented a Living Educational Theory Research response to disruptions and emerging transformations. The response was based on the disruptive experience of existing as a living contradiction in negating the values I held, together with the imaginative responses that focused on transforming practice in the direction of overcoming the negations and with living my values as fully as possible. I documented such contradictions and transformations some 30 years ago in Whitehead (1993).

The contents of Part 1 of the book list the contradictions and the analyses that provide the evidence of their transformations in a dialectical process of negating the negations in the generation of a living-educational-theory:

## **PART 1 THE GROWTH OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING ABOUT POWER**

- 1) *1977 Improving learning in Schools - an in-service problem*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/1ins77.pdf>
- 2) **1976 Living contradictions - I am a University Academic. I am not.**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/2ten.pdf>
- 3) *1980 In-service Education, The Knowledge-Base of Education*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/3ins80.pdf>
- 4) **1980 Living contradictions - I am a creative academic. I am not a creative academic. I can question the judgements of examiners. I cannot question .**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/4PhD.pdf>
- 5) *1985 An analysis of an individual's educational development - the basis for personally orientated action research.*

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/5anal.pdf>

- 6) **1987 Living contradictions - My writings are consistent with my duties as a University Academic . No they are not.**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/6disc.pdf>
- 7) *1989 Creating living educational theories from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/7livth.pdf>
- 8) *1990 How do I improve my Professional Practice as an Academic and Educational Manager? A dialectical analysis of an individual's educational development and a basis for socially orientated action research*  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/8wc90.pdf>
- 9) **1991 The actions of a Senate Working Party on a Matter of Academic Freedom.**  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/9senwp.pdf>
- 10) *1992 Paper - How can my philosophy of action research transform and improve my professional practice and produce a good social order? A response to Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt* <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bk93/10wc92.pdf>

More recently there have been disruptions caused by the pandemic of Covid-19. In the paper to CARN 2022 (Whitehead, 2022) I document how multi-media meetings through Zoom, Teams and SKYPE have helped to transcend these disruptions through Living Educational Theory Research.

- Pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity

Huxtable and I (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2021) have analysed our pedagogy of cooperation in higher education:

Hence the focus of this paper on enhancing educational influences in learning with a Living Theory approach to pedagogical Action Research in Higher Education. This paper presents an analysis of such educational influences. The analysis explains our educational influences in the learning of students who have progressed from the springboard provided by Action Research to recognising and valuing themselves as knowledge creating researchers who are contributing to a global knowledgebase. The analysis draws on data from supervising and tutoring successfully completed masters and doctoral programmes of professional development with teachers and other professional educational-practitioners.

- The transformative work of practitioner educators

In reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research I am including the transformative work of practitioner educators. This inclusion is made explicit in the following workshop presented virtually on the 4th November 2022:

**A workshop proposal on Living Educational Theory Research as Transformative Educational Research and Sustainable Development. For presentation at the Third International Conference on Transformative Education and Sustainable Development (TERSD), in Nepal 4-6 November, 2022.**

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Marie Huxtable, University of Cumbria

**The overall aim and scope** – demonstrate how to adopt a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continual professional development, is expanding the horizon of educational research and practice in transforming the hegemony of technical rationality with values of human flourishing.

“how do I enhance and explain my educational, values-laden, influences in my own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations, to live humanely, and help others do so too?”

### **Intended Learning Outcomes:**

- i) Know how to generate a living-educational-theory and to support others in generating and sharing their own.
- ii) Know how to use an action-reflection planner (e.g. <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arlivingtheoryplanner.pdf>) by working in pairs and the group helping others to do so too.
- iii) Understood key concepts and processes e.g. rigour and validity of accounts of living-educational-theories, values experienced as being contradicted by self, others and/or context to develop ways of improving matters, integrating insights from diverse knowledges to improve values-laden praxis...
- iv) Know how to collect data to e.g. understand and improve practice, clarify and communicate personal life-enhancing values embodied in practice and used in multi-media narratives. The values include care, freedom, love and justice.
- v) Know where to find resources and an international community of like-minded professionals to contribute to.

**Intended audience** – Practitioner Researchers in Higher Education and Schools asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, “How do I improve my professional values-laden practice, contribute to the growth of a global knowledgebase of education and help others to do so too?”

**Keywords:** Transformative Educational Research; Living Educational Theory Research; Continuing Professional Development; Learning with Values of Humanity.

- Education across different times and spaces

In reimagining our professional futures together with Living Educational Theory Research in educational contexts across different times and spaces, I include an archive of my own writings between 1967 - 2022 at <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml> . The archive includes collaborations in Living Educational Theory Research between individuals in different cultures and spaces. The Living Educational Theory Research draws insights from ideas generated in different times. For example, insights are drawn from 2,500 years ago from Plato’s dialogues on poetic inspiration that in turn draws insights from the teachings of Socrates. Ideas are drawn from the work of Marcuse, Popper and Habermas from the middle of the last century that are still useful in enhancing the validity of contributions to knowledge.

The significance also involves responding the key conference questions of:

- How do we develop the capabilities for our communities to adapt to and mitigate the challenges of our times?

In a recent paper in the Journal Educational Research for Social Change, on Developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Community Based Educational Research, Huxtable and I (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2022) provided an answer to the question, ‘How do we develop the capabilities for our communities to adapt to and mitigate the challenges of our times?’:

What educational-practitioners have in common is the intention of contributing to the learning of communities, and those who comprise them, to live values of human flourishing and to help other people, communities and Humanity learning to do so too. Professional educational-practitioner researchers can contribute to communities creating positive futures locally and globally by making public valid values-laden explanations of educational influence in learning. Author 1 coined the term ‘living-educational-theory’ for such explanations. The implications of educational-practitioners accepting professional responsibility for realising their humane values as fully as possible in practice and contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase by developing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Community

Based Educational Research are explored. These included individuals and communities identifying where they experience their educational-practitioner self as a living-contradiction and/or their values negated and creating constructive ways forward; testing the validity of claims to be improving educational practice which enhances educational, values-laden, influences in learning; strengthening accounts of learning to make positive social change in this complex and interconnected world through a process of social validation. Illustrative examples are given, and limitations, challenges and next steps identified.

- How might we promote civic discourse and freedom of expression through professional learning and education?

In her paper on 'The Role of Higher Education in Solving Global Problems' Jakubik (2022) offers an answer to this question. It focuses on Purpose, Approach, Findings and Originality/Value. I accept Jakubik's point that the World's global problems need urgent and sustainable solutions and actions. These problems can be faced by asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How can higher education develop authentic and responsible citizens who will be able to act and solve global problems?' I am offering a Living Educational Theory Research approach for exploring the implications of such questions in which authenticity and responsibility are fundamental values in supporting learners to develop their personal authenticity and responsibility in their educational inquiries. The doctorates at <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml> all demonstrate authenticity, responsibility and freedom of expression through professional learning and education. One of the best examples of the promotion of civic discourse is the development of the Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI) from the four Living Educational Doctorates, legitimated by the University of Limerick in 2006-2007, from Mary Roche, Caitriona McDonagh, Bernie Sullivan and Mairin Glenn. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2022 I gave an address to NEARI on 'Critical Reflection in Educational Practice' (Whitehead, 2022) (See <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwNEARImeet020422.pdf>) which I see as a contribution to promoting civic discourse and freedom of expression through a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and education.

- What role does professional learning have in tackling disadvantage, inequality, and promoting the long-term well-being of individuals and communities?

Bernie Sullivan's (2006) doctoral thesis on, 'A living theory of a practice of social justice: Realising the right of Traveller Children to educational equality'. (Retrieved from <https://www.jeanmcniff.com/items.asp?id=47>) explicitly addresses how a Living Educational Theory approach to professional learning in a process of continuing professional development, can help to overcome disadvantage and inequality.

In their Symposium, on 'Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century in global contexts through Living Educational Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry', at the American Educational Research Association 2022 Conference, with the theme of 'Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century', Jacqueline Delong (Canada), Jack Whitehead (UK), Parbati Dhungana (Nepal), Michelle Vaughan (USA) and Swaroop Rawal (India) explicitly researched the role their professional learning has in tackling disadvantage and inequality (Delong et al. 2022) In her presentation at this Symposium Dhungana (2022) explicitly researched the role of her professional learning from a Satvic perspective in promoting the well-being of individuals and communities with a Living Educational Theory approach to continuing professional development.

- What role does professional learning have in promoting sustainability, peace, justice and strong institutions?

Arianna Briganti (2021) graduated from University of Lancaster in November 2021 with her Doctorate for her thesis on 'My living-theory of International Development'. (Retrieved from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/ABrigantiphd.pdf>). It included her research in Afghanistan to promote peace, justice and strong institutions in enabling women to participate fully in the economy. However, in August 2021 Afghanistan returned to Taliban rule that has undermined these efforts with girls being denied access the education and women being denied access to equality in the workplace. This context is illustrative of the way in which the power of ideological control can overturn the influences of professional learning in promoting sustainability, peace, justice and strong



institutions. Another illustration of where this is happening is in Ukraine, where the Russian invasion has overthrown such initiatives and threatened the international order that has been supported, for the last 7 decades, by the United Nations.

- What can we learn from innovative approaches to engagement and learning across communities and societies?

My recent appointment, as Extraordinary Professor in Community-Based Educational Research at North West University in South Africa, is providing me with the opportunity to research the educational influence of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to engagement and learning across communities and societies. The Universities of Nelson Mandela University, Limerick University, North West University and the University of the Free State are considering signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the following areas of focus:



**Areas of Focus of MoU:  
Mandela, Limerick,  
North West and Free  
State**

- Contributing to changing society, starting with communities around the Institutions and in solidarity with other regional, national and global communities, through discovery, action, scholarship, and innovation.
- Developing strategic partnerships within the global higher education sector.
- Including the voices and agency of internal and external stakeholders; communities, especially those at the margins of change discourses.
- Mobilising the expertise and knowledge across the various disciplines of the Institutions in collaboration with external stakeholder communities to improve service to society and facilitate student and staff access and success.
- Unlocking knowledge that can make a meaningful contribution to the discourses on engaged scholarship, which seeks to explore sustainable solutions for a socially just society.
- Creating opportunities to contribute to cultivating socially conscious, globally, and nationally connected citizens who serve the public good.
- Co-constructing and sharing resources.
- Further development of the Limerick CWELL through partnership pilots

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In my continuing professional learning, I intend to research my learning, from the innovative approach of Living Educational Theory Research, with my engagement and learning across communities and societies.

The significance is also related to the evidence that contributors to International Professional Development are reimagining our professional futures together, with a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development, as we generate and share our explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which our practice is located.

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