

## **How did I contribute to the academic legitimization of two Living Educational Theory Research Master's Degrees?**

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The creation and legitimization of two Living Educational Theory Master's degrees is the culmination of three years work.

Both of the MAs have been designed to enable students to research areas of their leadership practice of interest to them from the perspective of their ontological and epistemological values:

### **MA: Values-led Leadership**

Research Design

Professional Enquiry

Values-led Leadership

Leading Change: social change, social movement, social justice

Dissertation

### **MA: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

Research Design

Professional Enquiry

Role of SENCO

Leading SEND

Dissertation

The current availability of leadership professional qualifications includes National Professional Qualification of middle leadership (NPQML)/senior leadership (NPQSL) and Headship (NPQH), alternatively a traditionally offered Master's Degree. I describe them as traditional because like the NP qualifications they are competency based. The masters enables the student to follow a named pathway designated by two key pathway modules. Under a leadership pathway modules can include coaching and mentoring, leadership and management in education, learning technologies, developing leadership capacity, quality leadership and management. If values are identified at most they come into one specified module.

Rationale:

This new MA will provide a space for leaders to reflect on the values that form the basis of their practice and vision for themselves as a leader within education. The modules within the MA Values-led Leadership pathway enable practitioners to research their educational influences in their leadership practice and to contribute to leadership knowledge, skills and practice, whilst clarifying and understanding their ontological and epistemological values. These values are used as explanatory principles and standards of judgement in their contributions to leadership knowledge. Living Theory research methodology incorporated within the modules supports research into practice in light of values, as students offer their own living-educational-theory as an explanation of their educational influences to the educational knowledge base (Whitehead, 2010)

The innovative focus of the programme has an emphasis on asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my leadership practice?' The course offers a focus on generating and sharing evidence-based explanations of the educational influences of leadership practice in the learning of self, learning of others and in the communities within which the leadership practice is located. MA students will act as a validation group for each other's research. This will support the interactive poster assessment.

With a minimum group size of 16 students, this will support challenge, discussion and clarification of professional values in practice. Students are supported through a student-centred, student-led, evidence-based, research-informed, problem-based learning (PBL) approach to learning. Cleaver, Lintern and McLinden (2014) extensively discuss the value of PBL and the benefits it can bring to students (and staff) in that it often has a 'transferable' value and avoids duplication of action, which is crucial for busy practitioners.

The range of assessment methods supports the development of a range of student's academic research skills. Students will have the opportunity to work with European Journal of Living Theories to publish their own researched living-theory. The values-led focus of this MA is complementary to the competency based professional development offered through NPQ ML/ SL/ H and complementary to the competency based leadership training provided through NPQ ML/SL/H it will support the professional development of values-led leaders for the future and will support career development of middle and senior leaders.

The MA can be delivered across schools in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), focusing on the core values promoted by the MAT and ensuring the development of leaders for the future. Values-led practice is at the heart of this MA and not just the focus of a single module. The Learning Institute promote the 'Learning Paradigm' stressing the need to generate learning, rather than the traditional 'Instructional Paradigm' which emphasises the delivery of content. The 'Learning Paradigm' empowers learners, who are recognised as discoverers of knowledge and gives the construction of discovered knowledge greater prominence than that of content. Experiential learning, rooted in Kolb (1984), is critical for our students as it aids reflective practice which is essential for any educational professional who is an effective practitioner. Barlow, Acroyd and Phillips (in Hartley et al, 2011) link this to the four stage cycle of concrete experience and this consolidates reflection. This four stage process encourages reflection in relation to our own assumptions towards learning.

Consequently, problem-based learning is a typical model used in the programme, advocating student-led learning which is facilitated by tutors, as are active enquiry, research, reflection and experiential learning. Other examples of small-group teaching are also used, such as the use of seminars, snowballing, role play, step-by-step discussion, syndicates and tutorials. Questioning, particularly Socratic questioning techniques, active listening and responding are also used for small-group teaching. Socratic questioning promotes higher order thinking skills which are essential in order to maximise teaching and learning opportunities (Hattie, 2014). This is an acknowledged and successful way of addressing student misconceptions which can lead to a change of view. Considering misconceptions through 'sensitive challenge' (Hattie, 2014, p.40), careful teaching and tutor guidance is very helpful to students. They learn from experience (Moon, 2009) For many students this is an experiential work-based learning programme that takes place alongside, and complements, employment. In some cases, the learning experience is an arrangement negotiated by students, tutors and sometimes the employer. In line with a student-centred and student-led approach, students are encouraged to value other programme members as a key resource to access peer support, in addition to tutor support, enabling them to theorise and articulate their understanding through seminar participation and discussion.

Cleaver, Lintern and Mc Linden (2014) *Teaching and learning in higher education: disciplinary approaches to educational enquiry*. London: Sage.

Hartley, P, Hilsdon, J, Keenan, C, Sinfield, S and Verity, M (2011) *Learning development in Higher Education* (eds) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hattie, J and Yates, G (2014) *Visible learning and the science of how we learn*. London: Routledge.

Kolb, D (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

Moon, J (2009) *Achieving success through academic assertiveness*. London: Routledge.