LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY RESEARCH AS AN EPISTEMOLOGY FOR PRACTICE

THE ROLE OF VALUES IN PRACTITIONERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable

Living Educational Theory Research as an Epistemology for Practice

This book explores a value-based research methodology, Living Educational Theory Research (LETR), which aligns a values-based approach with key tenets of professional development to inform and inspire future educators' practice.

Written by world-leading scholars in the field of LETR, the chapters are global in reach and promote the evolving and dynamic nature of the methodology and its application with real-world professional training within higher education. Through discussion and dialogue on the evolution of Living Educational Theory Research, the chapters explore topics such as professional development and community-based contexts, supporting academics wishing to improve their practice by placing the theory within a scholarly paradigm to legitimise its use for scholarly learning.

Demonstrating how insights from disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and psychology are integrated within the generation of living-educational-theories, this outwardly looking volume will appeal to postgraduate students, scholars and researchers involved with educational theory, action research and other forms of practitioner research, and education research methods more broadly.

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The Role of Values in Practitioners' Professional Development

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Introduction

This monograph is the first body of work to focus on the nature of the knowledge being generated through Living Educational Theory Research. As such it makes an original contribution to knowledge. In particular, it defines an epistemology for Living Educational Theory Research, making explicit the units of appraisal, standards of judgement and logics of the explanations for educational influences in the learning of professional practitioners, who are realising their responsibilities as global citizens. The monograph:

 i Offers an academic justification for professional practitioners, exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind 'How do I generate valid contributions to the growth of a global academic, intellectual and scholarly knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity?'.
 ii Provides live links to global resources that contain the evidence to justify all the claims to knowledge made.
iii Addresses differences in cultural values and influences around the world. These differences are acknowledged and integrated within original contributions to educational knowledge. These are exemplified by Living Educational Theory Research accounts, which have been academically legitimated by universities throughout the world.
iv Offers an original vision of professionalism that is values-led by adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing and continual professional development.

At a conceptual level, Living Educational Theory Research is an academically well-established, professional practitioner educational research, paradigm and methodology. At a practical level, it is the process that a practitioner engages in to create their own living-educational-theory, as they research into their practice to understand, improve and explain it. A living-educational-theory is the term coined by Whitehead in the 1980s for a valid, values-laden explanation, generated by a practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations, which form the context of the practice. A practitioner creates a living-educational-theory in answer to questions of the kind 'how do I improve what

I am doing to improve the process of education here?'. The 'here' is the context of the practice created by the social formation the practitioner is a contributing member of. The context includes the complex, relationally dynamic multidimensional ecologies and fluid, inter, intra and extra personal narratives they are also part of. Accounts of Living Educational Theory Research comprise narratives and explanations of present professional practice, which include learning from the past and intentions to create a better future with values of human flourishing.

The meaning we are giving to 'education' is that of a life-long, life-wide values-laden process of learning to live humanely a personally satisfying and socially productive and worthwhile life and helping others learn to do so too. This differs from the meaning of 'education' that is often taken to mean 'schooling', 'training' and the efficient transmission of skills, knowledge and dominating 'wisdoms' and social norms. We are focussing, in this monograph, on our meaning of improving education as a values-laden process, which is of current global concern. For example, nations have come together to agree that:

> Education is a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies.
>
> (UNESCO, 2016)

We have been going further with Living Educational Theory Research than implied in this 2016 statement from UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). We have been working with an understanding that the purpose is not just about empowering people to enhance their own lives and societies. Education includes empowering people to also contribute to enhancing the lives of other people and their societies and enhancing the learning of Humanity to flourish in and of the world now and for eons to come. The UNESCO International Commission expresses a similar view in the 'Futures of Education' (UNESCO, 2021). UNESCO established the commission in 2019 to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of Humanity and the planet.

> The right to education must be expanded to include the right to quality education throughout life. Long interpreted as the right to schooling for children and youth, going forward, the right to education must assure education at all ages and in all areas of life. From this broader perspective, the right to education is closely connected to the right to information, to culture, and to science. It requires a deep commitment to building human capabilities. It is also closely linked to the right to access and contribute to the knowledge commons, humanity's shared and expanding resources of information, knowledge and wisdom.
>
> (UNESCO, 2021, p. 12)

'The European Declaration on Global Education to 2050' (The Dublin Declaration, 2022), also emphasises a concern with improving education as a values-laden process for all, as illustrated by the summary on the first page of 'A European Strategy Framework for Improving and Increasing Global Education in Europe to the Year 2050' (GE 2050, 2022). Nations with their diverse cultures, histories and political and social ways of thinking, through many hours of discussion, came to agree which words to use to communicate their meaning of 'global' education, so we quote at length:

> Global Education is education that enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it; to open their eyes, hearts and minds to the reality of the world at local and global level.
>
> It empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring about a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability, and international understanding.
>
> It involves respect for human rights and diversity, inclusion, and a decent life for all, now and into the future.
>
> Global Education encompasses a broad range of educational provision: formal, non-formal and informal; life-long and life-wide. We consider it essential to the transformative power of, and the transformation of, education.

That is included in our meaning of education as a life-long, values-driven process of people learning to live humanely a life that is personally satisfying and socially productive and worthwhile, *and* (following White, 2021) helping others learn to do so too. Who are those others? Who are those 'others' a professional practitioner seeks to have an educational influence in the learning of? 'Others' are those with whom they have a personal connection with and those increasingly distanced, such as those who comprise local, national, international and global communities within which they live and work.

'The process of education here' is the process of individuals and collectives creating and engaging with their evolving educational programme of study (their educational curriculum) in the here and now. Their educational curriculum includes learning to acquire *and create* skills, knowledge, behaviours and habits of mind, which enable them to not simply survive. They are what enable a person to learn to flourish in their current circumstance and in times to come – and enable others to learn to do so too. Therein lies a potential conundrum. How to work productively and in a worthwhile manner with others when the values of others are experienced as contradicting our own? How to face productively the conflicts that emerge when what one individual person or collective does to flourish puts at risk the possibility of others flourishing? One of the distinctive and distinguishing features of Living Educational Theory Research, as a practice to bring into being a better future, is it requires an individual person or collective to identify and work creatively and productively with the tensions such conflicts and contradictions cause.

The world is facing a number of different crises, such as those Brown (2021) describes, which relate to war, climate change, a pandemic, energy, poverty and food, political and economic insecurities. This monograph explores the implications for individual people and collectives of accepting their educational responsibility, as professional practitioners, to ask, research and create valid answers to questions such as 'How do I improve my practice in ways that enhances educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing?'. The practice and understanding of the educational responsibilities of each one of us is affected by recognisable circumstances and contexts we live in, and by social, historical, cultural and political influences, which we are often unaware of. As human beings, we are all interconnected. So, this monograph is focussed on explicating the nature of the educational knowledge needed to enhance the flow of values of human flourishing across different cultures and contexts for eons to come.

The monograph, with its global focus, offers a Living Educational Theory Research approach for continuing and continual professional development in higher education institutions. This approach is relevant for all engaged in higher education and those who work in such institutions. It is particularly relevant to those providing in-service programmes for teachers and other professional practitioners who are working, learning and living in diverse cultural contexts. We draw on numerous publications and doctorates that have been legitimated by universities around the world[1] and workshops on Living Educational Theory Research, which have been run for professional practitioners, many of whom are university staff and students, living and working on all the continents of the world (except Antarctica).

Cultural differences are included within the text, showing how they influence the meaning of the embodied values of human flourishing, of the professional practitioners. The embodied values of the professional practitioner, clarified as they emerge in the course of the research, serve as the practitioner's explanatory principles in their explanation for their educational influences in learning in the different cultural contexts they live and work in. These differences are also acknowledged in the idea of professional practitioners as global citizens (Coombs, et al., 2014) contributing to the learning of Humanity to flourish.

The main themes of the monograph have emerged from the educational knowledge generated by professional practitioners exploring through Living Educational Theory Research the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind 'What contribution can I make to people, communities and Humanity learning to flourish as I research my professional practice to improve it?'. The themes include:

- The epistemological and ontological significance of an individual or social formation experiencing their 'self' as a living contradiction in claims to knowledge.
- The use made of empathetic resonance with digital visual data for clarifying and communicating the meanings of embodied values of human flourishing, in the course of their emergence, through the process of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research.

- The introduction of unique methodologies created in the course of generating valid and values and evidence-based explanations of educational influences in learning.
- The significance of developing the language of educational research, such as educational 'influence' rather than 'impact'.
- How both propositional and dialectical contributions to knowledge are drawn on to improve practice and research and generate valid explanations for educational influences in learning.
- Processes for enhancing validation and rigour in explanations for educational influences in learning.
- Global and large-scale social movements engaged with.

Living Educational Theory Research provides professional practitioners with an academic, intellectual and scholarly justification for the knowledge they claim to generate as a contribution to the growth of a global educational, values-laden, knowledge base of Humanity learning to flourish. The knowledge base currently comprises knowledge professional practitioners have created in the process of researching their practice to understand and improve it and explain their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations, which are the context of their practice. The 'educational' learning is that necessary for living humanely, a personally satisfying and socially productive and worthwhile life and helping others learn to do so too, in the multidimensional, relationally dynamic ecologies we are all part of. In short, the knowledge is in the form of Living Educational Theory Research accounts.

We believe that if more people developed their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research as a way of life, they would, in the process, enhance their contribution to a world within which humanity flourishes. By that, we mean a world formed by the complex, fragile ecologies we are part of, where we each can and do behave humanely and where Humanity, our species, can flourish. We believe most people want to flourish – not just survive but to flourish. When we say 'flourish', we mean they want to experience that warm feeling of satisfaction someone gets when they are (borrowing from some dictionaries) 'growing luxuriantly', 'thriving – progressing towards or realising a goal despite or because of circumstances', experiencing the feeling of being in a state of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) and realising their best intent (Huxtable, 2012).

We also believe that humans are social animals, and they do not flourish unless they are in a relationship of some form with one or more people. The nature of relationships is never static as they evolve (sometimes over years or even minutes), affected by a complex, changing mix of factors such as who, when, what, why and how. Our meaning of values of human flourishing includes learning from history when crimes against Humanity have been committed. Understanding these negations of human flourishing helps us to clarify what we mean by human flourishing. For example, Whitehead was born in

1944, towards the end of the Second World War, when human beings were murdering millions of other human beings. Such crimes against Humanity, which human beings continue to show themselves capable of committing, provide a backdrop of history against which to judge our contributions to enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for Humanity learning to flourish in a safe and peaceful world.

The monograph is written for professional practitioners, academics and scholars working in all fields of practice and disciplines. These include university academics and PhD researchers who want to generate knowledge that contributes to improving professional practice with values of human flourishing, whilst drawing on insights from an array of disciplinary forms of knowledge. Living Educational Theory Research is specifically relevant for individual people and collectives who want to realise their educational responsibility to contribute to the growth of academic, intellectual and scholarly knowledge with values of human flourishing. So, a Living Educational Theory Research approach is presented for professional development in higher education institutions, which provide in-service programmes for teachers and other professional practitioners. It fulfils the needs of those who accept their responsibilities as a professional to research the values-laden aspect of their practice to understand and improve it and contribute the valid explanations of educational influences in learning, generated in the process, to the growth of a global knowledge base.

The content of the monograph draws on primary research from numerous Living Educational Theory Research doctorates who have been legitimated as making original contributions to knowledge by universities throughout the world, as well as the online and physical libraries of the university awarding the degree[2].

An argument is presented for Living Educational Theory Research to be recognised, valued and worked with as an epistemology for practice by professional practitioners, whatever their field of practice and cultural context be. By engaging in Living Educational Theory Research, professional practitioners realise their responsibility as global citizens to generate valid academic, intellectual and scholarly contributions to the evolution of a global knowledge base of Humanity learning to flourish.

We refer to 'Humanity' as a global social formation, which transcends time and place. Words not only describe a reality. In their use and in the course of their embodied communication, their meaning evolves. As the meanings of the words evolve through use, they influence the nature of a discourse and the result of dialogue and contribute to the creation of realities. We are acutely aware of the limitations of this print-based monograph to communicate the meanings of the embodied meanings of values, which serve as explanatory principles and evaluative standards of educational influences in practitioners' accounts of their Living Educational Theory Research. We have therefore included some images and URLs to videos to augment the text.

The contents are organised into three parts:

Part 1 – Living Educational Theory Research generating knowledge **from** professional practice created by practitioners researching their values-led practice to realise their responsibilities as professionals. As an epistemology is a theory of knowledge, it is important to establish the academic legitimacy of the knowledge base from which this epistemology is created.

Part 2 – Living Educational Theory Research, evolution as an epistemology **of** practice. The epistemology is focussed on the unit of appraisal, the standards of judgement and the logics used in the theoretical analysis of the knowledge claims in accounts of Living Educational Theory Research created by practitioners researching their practice to realise their responsibilities as professionals. These responsibilities include professional practitioners holding themselves to account for enhancing their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations, which form the context of their researched practice.

Part 3 – Living Educational Theory Research as an extending epistemology **for** practice. This includes the development of practice-theory held together with a values-laden intent and learning from the past to create a future with values of human flourishing. The units of appraisal, standards of judgement and logics of Living Educational Theory Research constitute a relationally dynamic and extending epistemology. To realise their values-laden intent, of contributing to the creation of a better global future, professional practitioners clarify the influence of the social, historical, cultural and political contexts of the local and international social formations within which their research is conducted and offer an explanation for the influence of their research on those contexts and beyond.

Part 1 comprises five chapters:

Chapter 1, *Origins and what constitutes Living Educational Theory Research*, explains why a focus on 'What is educational?' matters so much in constructing education. Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner educational research. A distinction is made between the meaning of someone as a 'professional', that is a member of a profession, and 'being a professional'. Being an educational professional involves practitioners holding themselves to account for their practice by researching the values-laden aspect of their practice to understand, improve and generate a valid, values-laden explanation for their educational influence in the learning of the social formation which forms the context of the practice, in the learning those who comprise it and in their own learning to make a values-laden difference. We clarify the distinction we make between education research and educational research and explain the need to develop a different approach to creating educational theory than the 'disciplines approach'. Knowledge created in various academic disciplines and fields of

practice is creatively and critically engaged with by practitioners as they engage in Living Educational Theory Research to improve practice and generate their living-educational-theory. The distinction we draw between a living-educational-theory and Living Educational Theory Research is that a living-educational-theory is a valid, evidence and values-based explanation for an individual's educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation/s within which the practice is located. Living Educational Theory Research is the paradigmatic conceptual framework that distinguishes the research approach.

Chapter 2, *Living Educational Theory Research as a practice, process and methodology*, provides evidence to demonstrate how professional practitioners, working in diverse fields and contexts of practice, have contributed to the growth of a global educational knowledge base. This growth includes the valid, values-based explanations of educational-practitioners for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in. Living Educational Theory Research doctorates, masters and papers published in peer-reviewed journals are drawn on to illustrate the approaches taken by professional practitioners in contributing to the growth of a global, educational, knowledge base.

Chapter 3, *'Development of Living Educational Theory Research as an approach to continual and continuing professional development'*, distinguishes between continuing professional development and continual professional development. An argument is made for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development as a member of a profession and the continual professional development of professional practitioners realising their responsibilities as global citizens. Evidence is presented to show how a professional practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research methodology as they research into their practice to understand and improve it and to generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theories. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. Examples are given of the differences the approach has made to improve educational and professional practices. The difference is focussed on realising professional educational responsibilities to contribute to the knowledge base of education and global educational knowledge base for the flourishing of Humanity. The difference is also grounded in practitioners accepting their responsibilities as global citizens to bring into being a humane, peaceful world where all can flourish by living values of human flourishing. Examples, drawn from India, England, South Africa, Pakistan and Bangladesh, serve to emphasise the global influence of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional and educational development.

Chapter 4, *Development of Living Educational Theory Research as an approach to the development of pedagogy in Higher Education*, extends the approach in Chapter 3 to focus on the contribution of a Living Educational Theory approach, to developing pedagogy in Higher Education, in contributing to a knowledge base of education. The last 25 years have seen a growing interest in researching pedagogy in higher education. The meanings of educational practice, educational influences in learning, educational pedagogy and educational research are clarified in this chapter. In the discussion, we show how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to pedagogy in Higher Education enables students to engage in the highest levels of learning, creating and contributing knowledge with values that carry hope for human flourishing. The emphasis on the importance of academics in Higher Education publishing their research is increasing. So too, is sharing their understanding of the nature of the knowledge they are generating and sharing as they research their own pedagogies. The papers are drawn on to illustrate the meaning of values and evidence-based explanations of an individual's educational influence on the learning of others. This is subjected to analysis in Part Two by distinguishing an epistemology of practice in terms of the unit of appraisal, standards of judgment and logics in a Living Educational Theory Research approach to developing professional practice.

Chapter 5, *Living Educational Theory Research developing as a social movement with values of human flourishing*, looks forward to Part 3 on learning from the past to reliving a future with values of human flourishing with the focus in Chapter 9 on *Creating a future with Living Educational Theory Research*. It begins the creation of knowledge claims from a grounding within community and social engagement with enhancing the flow of values of human flourishing. These knowledge claims enable the development of a relationally dynamic epistemology in Part 3 that focus on the extended meanings of the unit of appraisal, standards of judgement and logics of Living Educational Theory Research as an Epistemology for Practice

Part 2 comprises three chapters:

Chapter 6, *Living logic: Defining the rationality of the explanations for educational influences in learning*, makes explicit what constitutes the logic that defines the rationality of a practitioner's explanations for their educational influences in learning. The living logic recognises the mutually exclusive statements in definitions of propositional and dialectical logics. In the generation of valid, evidence and values-based explanations for educational influences in learning, a practitioner elucidates their living logic, which is relationally dynamic and includes insights from both dialectical and propositional logics within the explanations.

Chapter 7, *A relationally dynamic epistemology emerging from Living Educational Theory Research*, explicates an epistemology of practice, which requires standards of judgment by which to judge the validity of a claim to

knowledge. In Living Educational Theory Research, these standards are expressed as the embodied relationally dynamic values of human flourishing and that practitioners use as explanatory principles in their explanations for their educational influences in learning.

Chapter 8, '*Original methods for Living Educational Theory Research*', explains why methods have had to be developed with examples of the use they have been put to by the originator and others. Rather than being applied at the beginning of the research, a living-educational-theory methodology is clarified in the course of its emergence as the research progresses. A similar process is required in terms of the methods that are needed to clarify and communicate the meanings of the embodied values that form the evaluative standards of practice. These are used to justify claims that the practice has had an educational influence on learning. They are also used as explanatory principles in the claims to knowledge.

Part 3 comprises two chapters:

Chapter 9, '*Creating a future with Living Educational Theory Research*' describes the future we have in mind. This is one where academic, intellectual and scholarly knowledge, as an artefact and in the process of creation, enhances the flow of values that carry hope for the flourishing of Humanity in a humane and peaceful world. Examples are drawn from the Living Educational Theory Research of those who have accepted their educational responsibility as professional practitioners and global citizens. This responsibility includes asking, creating and offering valid answers to questions such as, 'How can I, as a researcher, practitioner and global citizen, contribute to the development of local, national and global policies and practices which hold a hope of bringing into being a world with values of human flourishing, and help others to do so too?'. We illustrate how professional practitioners worldwide have been engaging for decades in Living Educational Theory Research to generate answers to such questions. In the process, they have critically and creatively engaged with various knowledge and united with researchers, professional practitioners and global citizens across multiple academic fields and disciplines to: improve their research and pedagogical practices for the benefit of all, transform education and research to enhance sustainable educational, values-led development of individuals and communities locally and globally and contribute valid accounts of the knowledge they generate to the growth of a global educational knowledge base.

Chapter 10, '*Living Educational Theory Research creating a values-laden epistemology for a better global future*', draws on our most recent work to explore the evolution of a relationally dynamic epistemology of practice created by professional practitioners, as global citizens, academic citizens and scholars, realising their educational responsibilities through Living Educational Theory Research. The unit of appraisal of the relationally dynamic epistemology created includes both community-generated

explanations for educational influence on learning and those generated by individual practitioners. The relationally dynamic, life-affirming and life-enhancing values that are clarified and communicated, in the course of the research, form the living standards of judgement in the development of relationally dynamic epistemologies as, of and for practice. The living logics define the rationalities of the explanations.

In the concluding chapter, the epilogue, which are the final pages of the monograph, we reflect on what we are hoping publishing this academic monograph might achieve. We reflect on the argument we have presented, the evidence we have drawn on and why we want to bring it to your attention. We reflect on the questions 'What use has all this effort been?' and 'What makes the effort we have put into creating this monograph and your effort engaging with it, a 'good' use of time and energy?' – and invite you to do the same.

Notes

1 See https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml for examples.
2 Many of the Doctorates can be accessed from https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml.

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