A living educational theory research approach to continual professional learning and development with values

Jack Whitehead & Marie Huxtable

Published online: 27 May 2025.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 109

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A living educational theory research approach to continual professional learning and development with values

Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable

Education, University of Cumbria, Lancaster, UK

ABSTRACT

We contend that *professional* practitioner's learning and development requires more than improving skills, knowledge and expertise associated with a field of practice and behaving in accord with the ethical statements of organisations. It requires practitioners to §realise their responsibilities to hold themselves to account for the consequences of their practice for human flourishing and contributing to the growth of a global knowledge base all may benefit from. *Professional* practice is shaped by, and shapes, dynamic, complex ecologies comprised of local, national, and global priorities and cultures. This is of international concern, as illustrated by The United Nations' vision for transforming education, the global vision in a European framework and the values vision of the Magna Charta Universitatum. We draw on academically rigorous and validated accounts of Living Educational Theory Research created by professional practitioners working in various fields and contexts. We analyse their accounts to illustrate how, by engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as CPD, professional practitioners establish a robust evidence base for policy and practice development, which enhance the learning of individuals and communities to flourish, help others do so too, and contribute to Humanity learning to flourish as a benign present in the world.

1. Introduction

Living Educational Theory Research is offered as a new way of theorising, professional learning and development (PLD) to improve the contribution professional practitioners can make to Humanity learning to flourish humanely. The approach requires professionals to take responsibility for their professional learning in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?'. The 'how' of each inquiry requires the professional to create their own methodology in generating their explanation for educational influences in professional learning, rather than 'apply' an existing methodology.

The answers include valid, value-laden explanations for the professional's educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social

CONTACT Jack Whitehead ✉ jack@livingtheory.org 🖂 Education, University of Cumbria, 70 Bloomfield Avenue, Bath BA2 3AA, UK

formations they comprise, which form the context of the practice. We explain how living-educational-theories (Whitehead 1989) fulfil their value-laden aims, with implications of the new knowledge for a Living Educational Theory Research approach to PLD. These aims include monitoring, evaluating and providing an evidence base for the development of policy and practice, which effect individuals and collectives, learning to flourish and helping others do so too. Practice is influenced by a fluid, complex ecology, comprising local, national and global agendas, priorities and cultures. We draw data from Living Educational Theory Researchers, as evidence of the effectiveness of adopting this approach to PLD.

We contend that *professional* practitioners' learning and development, requires more than improving skills, knowledge and expertise associated with a field of practice and behaving in accord with the ethical statements of organisations. It also requires educators to engage in a programme of learning and development that enables them to realise their responsibilities as *professional* practitioners. These responsibilities include educators researching their educational, values-led practice to hold themselves to account for understanding and improving their practice and contributing to the growth of a global knowledgebase all may benefit from.

We also contend that Living Educational Theory Research offers a framework for 21st century professional practitioners, such as teachers, who recognise and accept their responsibilities to not only improve their skills, knowledge and expertise associated with their field of practice, and to behave in accord with the ethical statements of organisations. They also accept their responsibilities to be critically aware of hegemonic influences of local, national and global cultures and priorities on their practice.

Whitehead became interested in what constituted professional practice and Educational Theory during his initial teacher education course at the University of Newcastle (1966–1967). He summarised where his thinking had got to as he entered the ranks of schoolteachers in his special study (Whitehead 1967) 'The way to professionalism in education?'. His introduction begins:

> The aim of this dissertation is to present the view that this country is in need of a professional body of educationalists. This conclusion has been reached from a study of the two major factors which affect our citizens, economics and ethics. (p. 1)

A great deal of what Whitehead wrote still has resonance today. He summarised four empirical criteria for the practice of teaching in schools and higher education to be recognised as a profession:

- A long period of specialised training.
- A broad range of autonomy for both the individual practitioner and for the occupational group as a whole.
- An acceptance by the practitioners of broad personal responsibility for judgements made and acts performed within the scope of professional autonomy.
- A comprehensive self-governing organisation of practitioners. (Fischer and Thomas 1965, p. 325)

These are still seen as relevant to what constitutes a profession in 2024. It is perhaps noteworthy that teachers in England, at this time, have yet to sustain the establishment of a professional body of teaching that meets even these four

criteria. What was beyond Whitehead's vision in the 1960s was a notion of what it was to be a professional practitioner as distinct from being a member of a profession. That developed during the gestation and subsequent development of Living Educational Theory Research as a form of professional practitioner educational research. A form that particularly addresses what is implied in the third criteria listed. That is a practitioner accepting personal responsibility for their decisions about their practice with respect to the effectiveness and educational value of what they do.

We intend this paper to make a contribution to the guidelines and resources, which enable universities, and those who comprise them around the world, to define, achieve engagement with, and live effectively, in accordance with their values of human flourishing. These are described in the Living Values Project of the Magna Charter Universitatum (MCU 2020), the Dublin Declaration (2023) on 'Global Education in Europe to 2050' (GENE 2022) and UNESCO's 'Incheon Declaration for Education (2023).

In this paper, we argue that by adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional learning and development, practitioners in Education can fulfil their responsibilities as *professional* practitioners. These responsibilities go beyond doing what is required by the social formations that shape their practice, such as professional and regulatory bodies, employers, and collectives with a shared purpose. Professional practitioners also have a duty to enhance the learning and development of those within these social formations, with the aim of creating a better world. Furthermore, as global citizens and human beings, professional practitioners have a responsibility to continuously learn and develop their ability to live a fulfilling, productive, and meaningful life, while also assisting others to do the same. They also have a responsibility to contribute to global knowledge of Humanity learning to flourish as a benign presence in the world and contributing to the complex ecologies we are all part of.

We present a concise overview of Living Educational Theory Research as a research methodology that is an integral part of an ongoing process of professional learning and development. We outline research methods with examples that have been devised to substantiate our claim that embracing a Living Educational Research approach to professional learning and development empowers practitioners to realise their responsibilities as practitioners, professionals, global citizens, and individuals. Finally, we conclude by addressing emerging concerns and issuing a call to action.

The content is structured as follows:

(1) Living Educational Theory Research as Continual Professional learning and development
(2) Living Educational Theory Research as a Methodology
(3) An Example of a Living Educational Theory Research Method
(4) Examples of Professional Practitioners Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to their Professional learning and Development
(5) Discussion
(6) Conclusion

1.1. *Living educational theory research as continual professional learning and development*

1974 saw the first issue of the British Journal of In-Service Education, with Whitehead's first of three professional learning papers on improving classroom practice (Whitehead 1977) generating professional knowledge (Whitehead 1980) and the creation of personal living-educational-theories (Whitehead 1983). The journal subsequently transformed into the Journal of Professional Development in Education. During the intervening five decades, Whitehead has focused on improving value-laden practice and theory. In 1989, Whitehead published his seminal work and coined 'living-educational-theory' for the valid explanations generated by practitioners for their educational, values-laden, influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations that form the context of the practice. He, and other professional practitioners, has supported numerous practitioners, working in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts, to adopt a Living Educational Theory Research approach (e.g. Whitehead 2018, Whitehead and Huxtable 2023, 2024a) to their professional learning and development, and contribute to the growth of a global knowledge base of educational, values-laden, theory and practice. We draw below on the work of some of those professional practitioners to demonstrate that such an approach to professional learning and development is a practical enterprise all professional practitioners can undertake, whatever their circumstances.

In this paper, we offer a way of theorising professional learning and development, which improves both educators' and learners' lives and contributes to bringing into being a more humane, safe and peaceful world, where all life can flourish. In doing so we seek to address issues of particular concern to readers of PDiE (Jones and O'Brien 2024).

The word 'professional' is given various meanings. We work with the Australian Council of Professions (2003) definition of a profession as a:

> ... disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards to which they hold themselves accountable. They are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others. (p. 1)

We concur with the exhortation by Beaton (2022) as he urges professionals to 'combine expertise and knowledge with altruistic intent, judgment, values and the ability to form relationships' (p. 32).

Our definition of professionalism made a clear distinction between being a member of a profession and being a professional practitioner. The professional practitioner clarifies, evolves and communicates the meanings of the values of human flourishing they embody in their practice. These meaning of embodied values form explanatory principles in their account of their living-educational-theory. This includes taking responsibility for continuously exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my educational influence in the learning of the social formation, which forms the context of my practice, including a responsibility to contribute to the flourishing of Humanity?'.

We share the vision of education as described in the 'European Declaration on Global Education to 2050' (Dublin Declaration 2023) as a life-long, life-wide process that: enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it. Education:

> . . . 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. (p. 3)

Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach helps us realise our responsibility as professional practitioners to be productive, improve our professional learning and development and contribute to 'a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability, and international understanding' (ibid), and help other individuals and collectives to do so too.

We agree with the points Garnier (2023, p. 1) made concerning the United Nations Vision for Transforming Education, that education confronts a dramatic triple crisis of equity, inclusion and relevance. As he points out, many educational systems are not equipping people with the values, knowledge, and skills they need to thrive in today's complex world. We also agree with his conclusion that education must be understood as a holistic learning process and that confronting the triple crisis of education, will require collective action. So, we offer a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and development, grounded in values of human flourishing, to support this collective action and the development of a collective imaginary to bring into being a better world (Drewell and Larsson 2019). A collective imaginary is 'the emergent property of the complex self-organisation of many minds with the capacity for symbolic language, and it is unique to human beings.' (p. 65)

A university's raisons d'être are not only to provide a site of learning and research but to also provide educational opportunities, relationships and experiences. We agree with the authors of the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU 2020) that there is no generally agreed canon of values. Each university has a responsibility to clarify its meaning of its own values of human flourishing through developing a collective vision and action. These form the unique constellation of intrinsic, life-affirming and life-enhancing values (Schwartz 1994, Crompton 2010), which a university has a responsibility to hold itself to account to and to realise in practice.

Whilst recognising the influences of these Global, European and Higher Education contexts in our work as professional practitioners, working and researching in education, we make a clear distinction between continuing and continual professional development. Continuing professional development is grounded in the requirements of professional organisations. Continual professional development is grounded in a sustained commitment to contribute to bringing into being a world with values of human flourishing.

Below, we present a concise overview of Living Educational Theory Research as an ongoing process of professional learning and development, as well as a research methodology. Subsequently, we outline a few methods with examples that have been devised to substantiate our claim that embracing a Living Educational Research approach to professional learning and development empowers practitioners to realise their responsibilities as practitioners, professionals, global citizens, and individuals. Finally, we conclude by addressing emerging concerns and issuing a call to action.

In the course of their research, practitioners identify where they experience themselves, their 'I', as a 'living contradiction' Whitehead (1989). What we mean by 'I' as a living contradiction in researching questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional practice with values of human flourishing?' is that the 'I' holds together a commitment to certain values with the experience of their negation in practice. This contradiction often serves to stimulate the imagination to think of ways of improving practice in the direction of living values of human flourishing more fully and provides the motivation to act. We are also aware of transformations in our meanings of 'I' in our own continual professional development as we work and research within an increasingly wide range of cultural and global contexts. This transformation can be understood as a movement from 'I' as an independent individual to a relationally dynamic 'I' located within, influencing and being influenced by, evolving sociohistorical, sociocultural and political understandings.

We recognise that we exist and are influenced in our professional practices within a complex ecology that include both human and post-human relationships. We represent these relationships by 'i~we' (Whitehead and Huxtable 2006, p. 2). The ~ indicates living-boundaries as 'co-creative spaces within which energy-flowing values can be clarified and communicated' (see Huxtable 2012, pp. 34, 53, 54, 197). The inclusion of the 'I' of the professional practitioner and their i~we relationships in their living-educational-theories contribute to extending current collective imaginaries in connecting abstract and conceptual thinking with practical actions that bring about real change.

2. Living educational theory research as a methodology

A methodology provides the theoretical analysis of the methods and principles associated with contributions to knowledge being made in the research. As 'methodology' and 'method' are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, it is worth repeating that a methodology is not the same as a method. A methodology offers the theoretical underpinning for understanding how the research was carried out whilst methods are the tools used.

We have found Creswell's (2007, pp. 53–58) descriptions of five qualitative research approaches to Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case Study to be one of the best introductory texts to these methodologies. For each of the five approaches Creswell poses a definition, briefly traces the history of each approach, explores types of studies, introduces procedures involved in conducting a study and indicates potential challenges in using each approach. He also reviews some of the similarities and differences among the five approaches 'so that qualitative researchers can decide which approach is best to use for their particular study' (p. 53). We are emphasising the point that a researcher need not choose one of these methodologies as they engage in Living Educational Theory Research. A practitioner can draw insights from any of these approaches, and others such as Action Research and Autoethnography, without choosing between them as they develop their own methodology in the process of creating their living-educational-theories.

A practitioner, employing a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional learning and development, draws on data from a range of international, educational contexts as well as using insights from the disciples of education. Data is used

as evidence to explain how the scholarship of teaching and learning in Higher Education is being generated and legitimated through a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and development (Huxtable and Whitehead 2023). We draw on validated accounts of individual researchers, generating and sharing their living-educational-theories, as data.

Whitehead (2023) focused on a process of communication that can captivate imaginations in the evolution of using technology globally in generating evidence-based explanations of your educational influences in learning and teaching in higher education. The evolution is focused on the use of technology in generating living-educational-theories in pedagogic, community-based educational research in different cultural contexts, such as the UK, USA, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and South Africa. A clear distinction is drawn between education research and educational research. Education research is carried out within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of the disciplines of education. Educational research generates valid, evidence and values-based explanations for educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing.

Our perspective on researching scholarship of teaching and learning in diverse cultural contexts, with a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and development, includes a necessary condition. This is the condition of generating and sharing explanations of educational influences in one's own professional learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social contexts within which the practice is located. See Delong and Whitehead (2023), for examples of the implications for practitioners working for a qualification at Masters and Doctoral levels.

3. An example of a living educational theory research method

We understand a method as a way of collecting data, or a technique of analysis. Whilst existing methods can be drawn on, in researching one's professional practice and educational influences in learning, it is sometimes necessary to create new methods. For example, to clarify and communicate the meanings of the embodied values used as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences, Whitehead (2010) created a method of empathetic resonance to analyse digital visual data in terms of the meanings of embodied values.

Whitehead drew on the work of Sardello (2008, p. 5) who uses empathetic resonance to mean the resonance of an individual soul coming into resonance with the 'Soul of the World' (p. 13). Whitehead used empathetic resonance to communicate a feeling of the immediate energy-flowing presence of another, communicating their embodied meaning of values of human flourishing, that give meaning and purpose to their practice and life. In producing communicable standards of judgement, that relate to embodied expressions of life-affirming and life-enhancing values, we use multi-media narratives with a shared experience of empathetic resonance (Whitehead and Huxtable 2006). We draw on the idea of empathetic validity (Dadds 2008) to develop a shared understanding. For Dadds, 'empathetic validity is the potential of practitioner research, in its processes and outcomes, to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, such that greater empathy and regard are created.' (p. 279)

Dadds 'distinguishes between internal empathetic validity as that which changes the practitioner researcher and research beneficiaries, and external empathetic validity as that which influences audiences with whom the practitioner research is shared' (ibid).

Empathetic resonance involves the ostensive expression of meanings in a process of constructing shared meanings of the expressions of embodied values, flowing with life-affirming and life-enhancing energy (Whitehead and Huxtable 2006). This is a very different process of philosophical reflection and meaning making to conceptual analysis where understanding a concept involves grasping a principle and the ability to use words 'correctly' as defined lexically, by other words in a dictionary.

The process of empathetic resonance cannot be demonstrated, at present, in many journals, because of the limitations of text or still images to communicate dynamic, embodied meanings. However, empathetic resonance has been demonstrated with visual narratives (Huxtable 2009) where a cursor is moved backwards and forward along a digital video-clip, with pauses where the viewer feels that the practitioner is expressing an energy-flowing ontological value. The effectiveness of the method, to communicate the practitioner's embodied values, in an account their living-educational theory, is tested with critical friends, members of a validation group and others prior and subsequent to publishing.

We have focussed primarily on the use of the methods of empathetic resonance and empathetic validity to communicate meanings of embodied values. This, and other issues, have been further dealt with elsewhere, for example in a paper presented at the BERA 2010 conference, 'How are we sustaining educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge?' (Whitehead and Huxtable 2010). Huxtable (2024) developed the method of living-posters for supporting the formation and sustaining of groups of Living Educational Theory Researchers. Our methods of interrogating the seven sets of materials below, to produce our summary paragraphs about each one, are as follows.

Each professional's living-educational-theory included a unique constellation of their embodied meanings of their values and contexts. From the range of doctorates available (LET 2024) we selected seven from a wide range of cultural contexts in South Africa, India, the UK, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The values used as explanatory principles were drawn from the claims to knowledge in the Abstracts of each thesis that had been judged by different universities around the world as having made an original contribution to knowledge.

In providing a critical review of the examples below, the claim is justified that Living-Educational Theory Research can promote professionalism. The initial purpose in supervising the doctorates was to demonstrate that individual practitioners could make public their embodied knowledge and make original contributions to knowledge. However, each doctorate was also presented as an explanation for the educational influences of the practitioner's professional learning and development. Hence, valid, evidence-based and values-laden explanations demonstrated that each practitioner enhanced their professional learning and development in the generation and validation of their living-educational-theory.

The fundamental critical point in the examples below is the use of each individual's unique embodied meanings of their constellation of values. These are clarified as they emerge through researching their practice. These subsequently are used as evaluative standards and explanatory principles in their explanations for their educational influence

in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formation, which is the context of the practice. These values are highlighted below from the Abstracts of each thesis where the originality of the knowledge-claims are outlined.

4. Examples of professional practitioners adopting a living educational theory research approach to their professional learning and development

We have developed a Living Educational Theory Research approach to Community-Based Educational Research to make a value-led, humane difference in a challenging world (Whitehead and Huxtable 2023). Chitanand *et al.* (2023) based in South Africa, and her colleagues adopted a similar approach. In doing so they illustrate the challenge of working with professional requirements to be accepted as a qualified member of a profession demanded in different countries and cultural contexts and the universal requirements of being a *professional* practitioner. For example, Greece requires a degree whilst Finland requires a master's degree. The approach to professionalism adopted here makes a distinction between being a member of a profession and being a professional practitioner, as described earlier. This approach requires the professional practitioner to test the validity of their explanations for their educational influences in learning. The process of validation includes clarifying and communicating the meanings of the values they use to distinguish the learning as educational. It includes testing the validity of educational knowledge claims generated through Living Educational Theory Research. The process is grounded in Popper's (1975, p. 44) insight that objectivity is grounded in intersubjective criticism that can be strengthened through 'the mutual rational controls of critical discussion'. The critical discussion in validation groups focuses on enhancing the comprehensibility, the evidence, the sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings and the authenticity of explanations of educational influences in learning. (Habermas 1976, pp. 1–2)

Rawal (2006) focused on influencing the curriculum in Indian schools to include life-skills education. She demonstrated the importance of engaging with the power relations and organisations that have a systemic educational influence in the learning of social formations. Subsequently, she has continued to engage in Living Educational Theory Research. Her numerous publications (e.g. Rawal 2024) show how she is realising her professional responsibility to improve her educational influence in the learning of the Indian local and national social formations within which her practice is located and contribute to Humanity learning to flourish too.

Mounter, an English educator, has evolved a Living Educational Theory Research approach to her professional learning and development when she moved to lecturing and providing INSET for teachers. She makes an original contribution to knowledge of professional learning and development in her doctoral thesis, 'A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Professional Development in Education' (Mounter 2024). In the course of her doctoral research, Mounter critically engaged with and analysed literature on Living Educational Theory Research. This revealed a limitation in the explanations of educational influences in learning across social formations. Mounter proposed the explanatory principle of the value of ~i~we~I~us~ relationships to highlight and transcend this weakness.

Potts (2012) researched and answered his question, 'How can I Reconceptualise International Educational Partnerships as a Form of "Living Citizenship"?' when teaching in an English secondary school. Potts developed a pedagogy for citizenship education through the establishment over 10 years of an international partnership between the school in Salisbury, England, he was teaching in, and a school in the black township of Kwamashu in Durban, South Africa. Underpinning values emerged as social justice, equal opportunities and the African notion of Ubuntu and humanity. Subsequently, he has continued to adopt a Living Educational Theory Research approach to his professional learning and development as a political and community activist as illustrated on his living-poster, which can be accessed from Potts, 2024 'living-poster' (https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/mark24.pdf). This includes his contributions to the development of the Salisbury Democracy Alliance, promoting deliberative democracy through Democracy Cafes and Citizens' Assemblies and as a volunteer for the Samaritans (see publications such as Coombs et al. 2014).

Naidoo (2005), a professional health practitioner, provided a potent illustration of empathetic resonance and validity when she used a video clip to explain the meanings of a compassion-driven passion as the manifestation of an embodied ontological value and as a living epistemological standard of judgement. That video-clip that can be viewed at Naidoo (2005), 'Marian Naidoo Passion for Compassion' (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxJIuUVE0qA). The clip is 1:03 minutes. If you listen to the clip of George talking about his life as a carer for Marian A., his wife of 55 years and who has Alzheimer's, and then move the cursor backwards and forward to take in all of the clip, gradually moving the cursor around 54 seconds we believe that you will feel Naidoo's meaning of a passion for compassion as Marian A. communicates her response to what her husband George is saying to Marian Naidoo (the researcher). Our own feeling is that Marian A's expressions also carry her own love and humour. The visual data is vital for communicating this meaning and can be felt, recognised and understood through an embodied empathetic response to both George and Marian A., their context, story and embodied expressions of meaning.

Briganti (2021), a Development Socio-economist, generated a valid explanation for her professional learning and development at doctoral level. She presented an evidence-based argument for International Development to be accepted as a worldwide obligation, encompassing various dimensions of collaboration, including the value of gender justice. She provides concrete examples of collaborating with others at the grassroots level, within diverse communities and contexts, such as Afghanistan, Albania, Ethiopia and Georgia. She explores partnerships developed at the organisational level, highlighting her evolving comprehension of the potential systemic impact her professional practice can have on a larger political scale and presents her living-educational-theory of International Development as 'an alternative to the neoliberal approach and rests on the idea that Development means having a chance to contribute to a good change (Chambers 1997, p. 743).' (ibid).

Qutoshi's (2016) doctoral journey in Kathmandu University as an educational leader in Pakistan culminated in his thesis, 'Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education In Pakistan'. His research enabled him to generate new knowledge on cultural-contextual educative practices of teacher education

and research endeavours, not only to improve his own professional learning and development but also transform professional learning, development and of educators throughout Pakistan. In his research into teacher education and research practices in Pakistan, Qutoshi generated a 'living-educational-theory of inclusive co-leadership with embodied values of intention of doing good for others, humility for humanity, care of self and others with ecological consciousness, love and peace' (Qutoshi 2016, Abstract).

5. Discussion

This discussion is framed by two underpinning raisons d'être of IPDA to:

(i) Support, develop and promote practice and research into effective professional learning and development by individual educators and institutions.
(ii) To monitor, evaluate and provide an evidence base for the development of policy and practice in professional learning and development.

Since the inception of IPDA and Living Educational Theory Research, understandings of 'education' and 'professional' have evolved (e.g. Kennedy and Stevenson 2023, Poekert & King, 2023). We note reference to 'continuing education and training' in 'The Story of IPDA', 2024 (https://ipda.org.uk/aboutipda/the-story-of-ipda/). Clearly, differentiating between 'education' and 'training' is important for professional practitioners. As language not only describes a reality but also helps to bring one into existence (Lakoff 2004), we agree with Biesta (2006) that a language of education needs to be developed.

The meaning we give 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, following White (2021), 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, dominating 'wisdoms' and social norms. Here we focus on the implications for professional practitioners improving their education and that of others as a value-laden process. The UNESCO (2016) report shows this to be of global concern. Our meaning of 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 years to come. The UNESCO International Commission expresses a similar view in the 'Futures of Education' (UNESCO 2021). UNESCO established the commission in 2019 to re-imagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of Humanity and the planet. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and development requires a deep commitment to building human capabilities. It is also closely linked to the right to access and contribute to the knowledge commons and Humanity's shared and expanding resources of information, knowledge and wisdom (UNESCO 2021, p. 12).

Our definition of professionalism makes a clear distinction between a practitioner being a member of a profession and being a professional. Professional practitioners continually research their practice to clarify, evaluate and communicate the meanings of the embodied values of their 'I'. They include these values as evaluative standards and explanatory principles in their validated and publicly shared living-educational-theory as integral to improving their

professional learning and development. The examples we include of professional practitioners adopting a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to their professional learning and development illustrate how professional practitioners not only hold themselves to account with respect to the ethical standards of organisations. The accounts also illustrate professional practitioners holding themselves to account by their own humanitarian values and contributing to the learning of others and the social formations within which their practice is located. They also recognise we are all interconnected hence, professionalism includes accepting individual and collective responsibility for contributing to tackling global problems while acting locally, and helping others to do so too.

We have drawn on Masters and Doctorates, legitimated by universities and papers published in peer-reviewed journals, to demonstrate how engaging in Living Educational Theory Research, extends the knowledge-creating capacities of professional practitioners, their professional learning, development and education. The examples also illustrate how professional practitioners, working in various contexts, fields of practice and academic disciplines, have developed their ability to realise their responsibilities as professionals and global citizen to improve practice and, in the process, contribute to the growth of global educational knowledge and the creation of a values-laden epistemology for a better global future.

In the editorial forewords to special issues of PDiE Kennedy and Stevenson (2023), introduce 12 articles exploring the potential of professional learning to be disruptive in challenging current inequalities, dominant ideas, and established orthodoxies.

In another special issue of PDiE, Poekert, & King (2023) introduce 17 articles. We agree with the authors of the editorial forewords that transformative professional learning can enable critical consciousness, which is liberatory and emancipatory. However, in both special issues there is no evidence that they, or the authors of the 29 papers, hold themselves to account for their own professional learning and development to realise their values-laden responsibilities as professional practitioners. Our analysis of the contents of the special issue of PDiE (2023). on 'Beyond reproduction: the transformative potential of professional learning', reveals a logic and language that serves to reproduce rather than transform existing forms of professional learning and development. The transformative potential of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and development has been explored in contributions to International Conferences on Transformative Educational Research and Sustainable Development (Whitehead and Huxtable 2024b, Whitehead 2024a,b)

In this article we have explained why our inclusion of the 'I' of the responsible professional and their i~we relationships, in the generation and sharing validated accounts of their living-educational-theory, can enhance these potentials of professional learning. Kennedy and Stevenson seek to understand how professional learning can be genuinely transformative, not only by opening up possibilities that may be beyond our current imagination, but which connect abstract and conceptual thinking with practical actions capable of bringing about real change. We have explained how the inclusion of the 'I' of the professional and their i~we relationships, in their living-educational-theories, could extend current imaginaries in connecting abstract and conceptual thinking with practical actions that bring about real change in enhancing the flow of values of human flourishing.

We have used evidence from data drawn from different international contexts to make the argument for educators, working in diverse cultural contexts, to engage in Living Educational Theory Research as professional learning and development. This evidence has illustrated how, in doing so, practitioners realise their educational responsibilities to contribute to the global development of professional learning and development as indicated by the above aims of IPDA.

The argument we have presented has been focused on the necessary conditions of Living Educational Theory Research. This requires the generation and sharing of living-educational-theories in which individuals and communities generate, test the validity of, and share their values-laden explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations within which the practice is located. The values drawn on, in the explanations, are the practitioners' meaning of their embodied values of human flourishing, clarified as they emerge through their research. We acknowledge the importance of other forms and fields of knowledge in generating insights that can extend the cognitive range and concerns of individuals and communities. We have given our reasons for advocating Living Educational Theory Research as an extending epistemology for a better global future elsewhere (e.g. Whitehead and Huxtable 2024a). It includes challenging and extending cognitive range and concerns to realise the responsibility we each have, of accounting to oneself as well as others, for living values of human flourishing as fully as possible, in one's practice, whatever that may be.

The evidence we have drawn on includes numerous Living Educational Theory Research doctoral theses that have been legitimated by universities around the world and made freely available from a website of Living Educational Theory Research (LET 2024). Each doctoral thesis has been judged as making an original contribution to knowledge by the university awarding the doctorate. We have also drawn on Masters' work and published papers. We wanted to bring this evidence to your attention because we believe that there may be some scepticism that professional practitioners can generate original contributions to knowledge with values of human flourishing from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my values-laden professional practice?'.

The responsibilities of a professional practitioner include a realistic evaluation by them of their positionality. By this we mean that historical, cultural, political and economic context can influence professional practice and learning. The concerns of teachers, in the initial years of their professional engagement, are likely to be different to teachers' who are working towards their Masters and Doctoral degrees as part of their in-service professional learning and development, as well as those who are engaged in post-doctoral enquiries. Teachers, like other professional practitioners who are at the beginning of their professional development, are likely to be focused on learning the skills and acquiring the knowledge associated with their field of practice. The Masters we refer to illustrate how practitioners can deepen and extend their understanding of the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of insights from the disciplines of education such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education and how such insights can help to improve their educational influences in learning.

Cultural contexts can influence the nature of knowledge that is generated and shared from professional development programmes. For example, educational researchers who are engaged in asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do

I improve my educational influences and help others to do so too?' have encountered opposition to the inclusion of 'I' in a research question and knowledge-claims. The opposition has come from researchers who are committed to the epistemology of positivist research programmes and who do not appear to understand that intersubjective criticism can strengthen the objectivity of an individual researcher's explanation of their educational influence in learning, through the rational control of critical discussion (Popper 1975, p. 44).

6. Conclusion

We have contended that by adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional learning and development, practitioners and members of professional organisations, such as IPDA, can realise their responsibilities as an individual and as a member of collectives, to address global issues at a local level. We have emphasised the importance of collective action in generating a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional learning and development. This includes accepting a personal and professional responsibility to making public the knowledge generated. Making value-laden knowledge public enables knowledge to be scrutinised and criticised in ways that test the validity of the knowledge claims. This process can enable professional practitioners to extend and transform their own knowledge, understanding and practice and help others to do so too. At the heart of Living Educational Theory Research is an understanding and transformation of, 'what is educational?' (Whitehead and Huxtable 2023). Through an individual and collective commitment to transform professional learning and development, with the values of human flourishing, we believe professional practitioners can contribute not only to their own ability to flourish and those they work and live with, but also to the ability of Humanity to learn to flourish and so bring into being a better world.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

References

Australian Council of Professions, 2003. *What is a profession?* Available from: www.Professions. org.au/what-is-a-professional.
Beaton, G. R., 2022. *Why Professionalism Matters More than Ever*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.4196212.
Biesta, G.J.J., 2006. *Beyond Learning; democratic Education for a human future*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
Briganti, A., 2021. *My living-theory of international development*. PhD. University of Lancaster. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/ABrigantiphd.pdf.

Chambers, R., 1997. Editorial: responsible well-being — a personal agenda for development. *World development*, 25 (11), 1743–1754. doi:10.1016/S0305-750X(97)10001-8.

Chitanand, N., *et al.* 10–13 Oct 2023. Advancing living educational theory research for enhancing multimodal professional practice and reshaping the future of higher education. In: *Presentation to the annual learning & teaching imbizo 2023 'beyond limits: reshaping the future of higher education.* Durban, South Africa. Retrieved from the Coastlands Umhlanga Hotel. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/ltimbizo1023dut.pdf.

Coombs, S., Potts, M., and Whitehead, J., 2014. *International educational development and learning through sustainable partnerships: living global citizenship.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Creswell, J.W., 2007. *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches.* California, London, New Dehli: Sage.

Crompton, T., 2010. Common cause: the case for working with our cultural values. Available from: https://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/common_cause_report.pdf. [Accessed 12 Aug 2013].

Dadds, M., 2008. Empathetic validity in Practitioner-Research. *Educational action research*, 16 (2), 279–290. doi:10.1080/09650790802011973.

Delong, J. and Whitehead, J., 2023. *You and your living educational theory.* London: Routledge.

Drewell, M. and Larsson, B., 2019. *Changing the world we create: beyond climate crisis, polarized societies and failed leadership.* Stockholm: Foresight Press.

Dublin Declaration, 2023. *Global education in Europe to 2050.* Dublin: European Congress on Global Education. Available from: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/GENE_Liam_Dublin_Declar_progress.pdf.

Fischer, L. and Thomas, D.R., 1965. *Social foundations of educational decisions.* Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.

Garnier, L., 2023. Foreword by the special adviser of the Secretary-General on the transforming education summit in report on the 2022 transforming education summit: convened by the UN Secretary-General. New York: United Nations. Available from: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/report_on_the_2022_transforming_education_summit.pdf.

GENE, 2022. *Global education network europe.* Available from: https://www.gene.eu/what-we-do .

Habermas, J., 1976. *Communication and the evolution of society.* London: Heinemann.

Huxtable, M., 2009. How do we contribute to an educational knowledge base? A response to Whitehead and a challenge to BERJ. *Research intelligence*, 107, 25–26. Available from: htttp://actionresearch.net/writings/huxtable/mh2009beraRI107.pdf. [Accessed 11 Jan 2010].

Huxtable, M., 2012. *How do I evolve living-educational-theory praxis in living-boundaries?.* PhD. University of Bath. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/mariehuxtable.shtml.

Huxtable, M., 2024. *Living-poster homepage.* Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2023.pdf.

Huxtable, M. and Whitehead, J., 2023. Researching scholarship of teaching and learning in diverse cultural contexts with living educational theory research. In: *Presentation at the 2023 Conference of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning ISSoTL. at Utrecht University 8-11th.* Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/mhjwjointISSOTL081123.pdf. [Accessed Nov 2023].

Incheon Declaration for Education, 2023. The Incheon declaration for education 2030. Available from: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/.

Jones, K. and O'Brien, J., 2024. From INSET to professional learning: 50 years of change as seen through the pages of professional development in education. *Professional development in education*, 50 (1), 1–10. doi:10.1080/19415257.2024.2296231.

Kennedy, A. and Stevenson, H., 2023. Beyond reproduction: the transformative potential of professional learning. *Professional development in education*, 49 (4), 581–585. doi:10.1080/19415257.2023.2226971.

Lakoff, G., 2004. *Don't think of an elephant: know your values and frame the debate.* Vermont: Chelsea Green.

LET, 2024. *Living educational theory doctorates.* Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml .

MCU, 2020. *Magna Charta Universitatum*. Available from: https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/mcu2020.

Mounter, J., 2024. *A living educational theory research approach to continuing professional development in education*. PhD. University of Cumbria. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/2024MounterPhd.pdf.

Naidoo, M., 2005. *I am because we are a never ending story . . . the emergence of a living theory of inclusional and responsive practice*. PhD. University of Bath. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/mnphd/6.pdf.

PDiE, 2024. *Aims and scope*. Available from: https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjie20/about-this-journal.

Poekert, P. and King, F., 2003. Leading professional learning to navigate complexity. *Professional development in education*, 49 (6), 953–957. doi:10.1080/19415257.2023.2277572.

Popper, K., 1975. *The logic of scientific discovery*. London: Hutchinson & Co.

Potts, M., 2012. *How can I reconceptualise international educational partnerships as a form of 'living citizenship'?* PhD. Bath Spa University. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/markpotts.shtml.

Potts, M., 2024. Living-poster. Retrieved from https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/mark24.pdf .

Qutoshi, S.B., 2016. *Creating living-educational-theory: a journey towards transformative Teacher education in Pakistan*. PhD. Nepal. University of Kathmandu. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/sadruddin.shtml.

Rawal, S., 2006. The role of drama in enhancing life skills in children with specific learning difficulties in a mumbai school: my reflective account. PhD. University of Worcester. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/living/rawal.shtml.

Rawal, S., 2024. *Living-poster*. Available from: http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering/documents/swaroop/swaroop-living-poster-240520.pdf .

Sardello, R., 2008. *Silence: the mystery of wholeness*. Berkeley: Goldenstone Press.

Schwartz, S.H., 1994. Are there universal aspects in the structure and contents of human values? *The journal of social issues*, 50 (4), 19–45. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x.

UNESCO, 2016. *Incheon declaration and framework for action for the implementation of sustainable development goal 4*. Paris: UNESCO. Available from: https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf .

UNESCO, 2021. *Futures of education. Reimagining how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet*. Paris: UNESCO. Available from: https://www.unesco.org/en/futures-education.

White, J., 2021. *Transforming education*. New Visions for Education Group. Available from: https://newvisionsforeducation.org.uk/transforming-education .

Whitehead, J., 1967. *The way to professionalism in education* a special study on the diploma of education programme at the. University of Newcastle, Department of Education. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jackstudy1967all.pdf.

Whitehead, J., 1977. Improving learning in schools — an In-service problem. *British journal of inservice education*, 3 (2), 104–111. doi:10.1080/0305763770030206.

Whitehead, J., 1980. In-service education: the knowledge base of educational theory. *British journal of inservice education*, 6 (2), 89–92. doi:10.1080/0305763800060205.

Whitehead, J., 1983. The use of personal educational theories in In-service education. *British journal of In-service education*, 9 (3), 174–177. doi:10.1080/0305763830090307.

Whitehead, J., 1989. Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, 'how do I improve my practice?' *Cambridge journal of education*, 19 (1), 41–52. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/livtheory.html.

Whitehead, J., 2010. *Meanings of empathetic resonance and validity in visual narratives: a passion for compassion and loving what we are doing*. Available from: https://actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwempatheticresonancepaperopt.pdf.

Whitehead, J., 2018. *Justifying your creation of a living theory methodology in the creation of your living educational theory*. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arsup/livingtheorymethodologies.pdf.

Whitehead, J., 2023. Using technology globally in evidence-based pedagogic research in living-educational-theories. In: *At the SOLSTICE/CTL Conference at Edge*. Hill University. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwedgehill2023.pdf. [Paper presented 15th June 2023].

Whitehead, J., 2024a. Transformative living educational theory research in the landscapes of cultural and religious diversity. In: *Keynote presented to the 4th International Conference on Transformative Educational Research and Sustainable Development (TERSD)* Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jackkeynotetersd191024.pdf.

Whitehead, J., 2024b. The dragons of conflict in 54 years of a global, living educational theory research approach to professional development. In: *Paper presented at the 2024 International Professional Development Association Conference 15 November Aston University Conference Centre*. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwipda111124.pdf.

Whitehead, J. and Huxtable, M., 2006. *How are we co-creating living standards of judgement in action-researching our professional practices?* multi-media text presented at the world congress of ALARPM and PAR. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwmh06ALARPMmulti.pdf. [in Groningen 21–24 Aug 2006].

Whitehead, J. and Huxtable, M., 2010. *How are we sustaining educational relationships to improve educational practices with teachers and pupils in the generation of educational knowledge?* presentation at BERA 2010. Available from: https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/bera10/jwmhBERA10.pdf.

Whitehead, J. and Huxtable, M., 2023. Why a focus on 'what is educational?' matters so much in reconstructing education? *Irish educational studies*, 44 (1), 167–182. doi:10.1080/03323315.2023.2251451.

Whitehead, J. and Huxtable, M., 2024a. *Living educational theory research as an epistemology for practice: the role of values in practitioners' professional development*. London: Routledge.

Whitehead, J. and Huxtable, M., 2024b. Developing, sustaining and thriving transformative living educational theory research and practice in challenging times and contexts. *Journal of transformative praxis*, 5 (1), 9–25. doi:10.51474/jrtp/15753.