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How teachers are contributing to the development of local, national and global equitable, inclusive education through their values-focussed professional development.

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For presentation at the 2025 Conference of the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching at the University of Glasgow on the 2nd July 2025

Abstract

This research aims to provide an evidence-based explanation of how self-study practitioner-researchers can contribute to the development of education, research, pedagogical practices and policies with values of human flourishing, “to ensure that education truly transforms lives in the world” (Education 2030 Incheon Declaration).

The theoretical framework integrates insights drawn from practitioners’ values-laden knowledge and theories, generated as they engage in professional practitioner, educational, self-study research, professional development, and theories and knowledge generated by psychologists, sociologists and philosophers.

Methods include journaling, narrative, cycles of action-reflection, and living-posters to create and collect data. Innovative methods are used to analyse digital visual data to clarify and communicate embodied meanings of values of human flourishing, which serve as evaluative standards and explanatory principles in explanations for educational influences in learning.

The findings are focused on the evidence-based and values-laden explanations of teachers researching their practice to realise their responsibilities as professional practitioners and global citizens. These explanations illustrate the quality of the equitable, educational opportunities; experiences and relationships for all students, whatever their background and circumstance.

The research contributes to the growth of educational knowledge and theory formation, improving the quality of equitable and inclusive teaching practices at all levels of education locally, nationally and globally, by teachers engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as their values-focussed professional development.

Introduction

Introduction

The context of this presentation is that of the conference of the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching and the Self-Study Education Practice American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group and their respective *raison d'être*. My intention in presenting this paper is to attract your attention educationally to Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 1989, Whitehead & Huxtable, 2024) and persuade you, as a professional educator and member of professional associations such as ISATT and S-STEP SIG, to explore further the implications of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development “to ensure that education truly transforms lives in the world” (Education 2030 Incheon Declaration).

The structure of the presentation is as follows:

- Living Educational Theory Research as values-focussed continual professional development
- Research methods
- Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Living Educational Theory Research as values-focussed continual professional development

Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner educational research. It is not engaged in as a one-off activity to meet requirement of a controlling authority, maintain membership of a professional body or improve a CV. Rather Living Educational Theory Research provides a framework for a practitioner to meet such requirements in the process of engaging in a continual process of researching their practice to realise their values-laden responsibilities as professionals. As they continually engage in Living Educational Theory Research a professional practitioner researches their practice to understand and improve it with values of human flourishing, create their living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) and contribute the knowledge they generate in the process to a global knowledgebase. A living-educational-theory is a practitioner's valid, values-laden, explanation for their educational influence in the learning of the social formation, which forms the local context of their practice, to realise its *raison d'être* with values of human flourishing, in the learning of those who comprise it, and in their own professional learning and educational development.

Unlike other paradigms concerned with the creation of values-laden knowledge that contributes to Humanity flourishing as a benign presence in the world, Living Educational Theory is not a conceptual framework taken and applied. Instead professional practitioners, in the course of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research, create their own living-educational-theory research methodology. They also critically and creatively engage with knowledge created in a variety of disciplines and fields of practice to enhance their professional learning, practice and development. As the research progresses the professional practitioner brings accounts to a group of peers to help them strengthen their research and test the validity of their claims. This group Whitehead refers to as a 'validation group'. Others may recognise it as a type of 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or a group of 'critical friends'.

By engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as professional development, practitioners hold themselves to account to make a productive and worthwhile contribution to the flourishing of the social formation, which is the local context of their practice, and those who comprise it. They are also able to fulfil their responsibility to contribute to the growth of global academic and scholarly knowledge, which is educational and values-focussed. By existing we are each a contributing part of complex relationally dynamic and multidimensional ecologies. Living Educational Theory as a paradigm provides a framework that brings into focus the contradictions and paradoxes a professional practitioner experiences. This enables them to contribute to the learning of individuals and Humanity to bring into being a more humane world, where all can flourish as a benign presence.

English can be very confusing – for example a practitioner can be described as a professional simply by doing what is required to be accepted as a member of a professional body. However, there has long been an argument that to be a professional practitioner requires a practitioner to accept their values-laden responsibility to contribute to the ‘common good’ in the course of their practice (see for example Australian Council of Professions, 2003). This argument has been made with respect to Living Educational Theory Research as professional development over the years, for example Whitehead when president of BERA (e.g. Whitehead, 1989), then later working with Huxtable (e.g. Whitehead & Huxtable, 2015, 2024)

Research methods

Engaging in professional practitioner educational research requires research methods fit for purpose. So, research methods have been used and devised by teachers and other professional practitioners engaged Living Educational Theory Research to enable them to identify, clarify and communicate the embodied meanings of their values of human flourishing that emerge in the course of their research. They subsequently use the values to evaluate improvement in their practice and the educational consequences for the social formation/s that form the context of their practice, those who comprise them, and for themselves as a teacher and a professional practitioner. They also use these values as explanatory principles in their explanation for their educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing of the social formation/s that form the context of the practice, those who comprise them, and in their own learning to realise their responsibilities as a teacher and professional practitioner.

Research methods include:

- Journaling: Collecting their own reflections, experiences etc. as they occur and that of others e.g. in the form of notes of conversations/emails from student/colleague/manager... about the influence of what they are doing etc.
- Narrative Inquiry: Creating their personal stories of their professional learning, growth and educational development.
- Action-Reflection Cycles: Records to assess the contribution changes in their practice make to improve the educational learning of individuals and the social formation within which they are practicing.
- Auto-ethnographical Research: To help the practitioner understand how their praxis and beliefs reflect and are shaped by not only the local context within which they work but also the influence of national and international social and cultural systems — and how they might influence for the common good the complex ecologies within which they are living.
- Self-study case study: To examine and find ways to improve learning with values of human flourishing in the complex ecologies that forms the context of their practice. Particularly those they encounter and have to find productive and worthwhile ways of working with where they experience themselves as a living-contradiction and/or they experience their values contradicted by others and/or local, national and international social formations which form the context of their practice.
- Living-interactive-posters: (Mounter, 2025) A living interactive poster is an important way of reflecting deeply on your research, as you share and refine it through challenge and questioning from critical friends in your Peer validation Group.

Whitehead created a method of empathetic resonance to analyse digital visual data to clarify and communicate the embodied meaning of a practitioner's relationally dynamic values of human flourishing (Whitehead, 2016).

I will now move on to present examples to illustrate how, by engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development, teachers can, and do, contribute to the development of local, national and global equitable, inclusive education through their values-focussed continual professional development.

Findings

I present here just a few of the many doctoral theses created by professional practitioners engaged in Living Educational Theory Research legitimated by universities as making an original contribution to knowledge. I have selected these to illustrate how teachers practicing in diverse cultural contexts are contributing to the development of local, national and global equitable, inclusive education through Living Educational Theory Research as values-focussed professional development. I have also selected these as they are easily and freely accessible from <https://actionresearch.net/>. Accessing the data enables you to examine the data drawn on as evidence to support my claim that teachers are contributing to the development of local, national and global equitable, inclusive education by engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development.

Mounter, J. S. (2024) A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Professional Development in Education. University of Cumbria, UK. Access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/2024MounterPhd.pdf>.

I selected this thesis as an example of a teacher who developed her knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development over 20 years. Mounter began her Living Educational Theory Research continual professional development when she was teaching a class of 6/7 year-old children in a rural English school. She completed her Masters (access all units and dissertation from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>) as a Head-teacher. When she moved onto lecturing and supporting the professional development of teachers and leaders in Education she embarked on her doctoral research programme. In the process she created Living Educational Theory Research Masters and apprenticeship programmes which were validated by Newman University, UK. Her doctoral research programme is evidence that justifies her claim in her abstract to have contributed:

... to the field of the continuing professional development of educational practitioners. The originality of my thesis proposes Living Professionalism as a new professional, values-led Teacher Standard of professionalism, where educational practitioners accept educational responsibility for their own continuing, values-led, professional development. This includes teachers continually researching their practice to improve it, generating values-laden explanations of their educational influence in learning, contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase. (Mounter, 2024, p.1)

Russell, M.P. (2021) *Privileging Tacit Knowledge within a Software Engineering Curriculum: A Living Educational Theory of Practice*. Maynooth University, Ireland. Access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/russellphd2021.pdf>

Russell's practice as an educator was situated in an Irish university. He researched his practice as a lecturer teaching a software engineering curriculum. In his thesis he offers evidence of the influence developing his knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research through his doctoral research programme had on his continual professional development to realise his responsibilities as a professional practitioner. He summarises in his abstract:

... I inquired into my pedagogical practice by questioning the nature of knowledge I valued as a lecturer. This questioning led me to develop my 'living educational theory' (Whitehead, 1989, p.41) of privileging tacit knowledge within a Software Engineering curriculum. My living educational theory is grounded in ideas of professional knowledge, relationships, competence, and expertise. In developing my theory, I explain how I transformed my ontological values of justice, democracy, and care in relation to students through standards of judgement that I developed to direct, test, and evaluate actions I took to improve my pedagogical practice. I describe how I experienced conflict between my existing practice and ontological values that led me to see myself as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989, p.41) and to critique the dominant didactic perspectives located within my practice which privileged explicit disciplinary knowledge within a Software Engineering curriculum. (Russell, 2021, p.7)

Wolvaardt, J.E. (2013) *Over the conceptual horizon of public health: A living theory of teaching undergraduate medical students*. University of Pretoria, South Africa. Access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/wolvaardtphd/Wolvaardtphd2013.pdf>

Wolvaardt summarises the context and purpose of her doctoral research programme in her abstract:

The health needs of society extend beyond the treatment of the individual and the ill. These needs are at the core of public health which addresses health at a population-level. Regulations dictate that public health must be included in the South African medical curriculum, but healthy populations hold little interest for medical students. As a result public health remains over the conceptual horizon of medical students.

At the University of Pretoria the responsibility for the inclusion of public health is the responsibility of the School of Health Systems and Public Health. Participation in the medical curriculum is a minor but important part of my educational practice. But two of my professional values – care and agency – have been denied in that practice. The central purpose of the research was to construct the meaning of my educational practice with the aim of progressive realisation of my values. (Wolvaardt, 2013, p.iv)

In her conclusion she summarises the implications for her of developing her knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development, and potentially others:

This practitioner research and my concurrent professional development as an educator have allowed me to not only scratch an intellectual itch but to transform my professional identity beyond my educational practice. I have created meaning of this professional identity within my personal and professional context and have transformed my educational practice by living my values of agency and care in practice. I think construction of this knowledge I have reflected on how my beliefs are socially constructed and how these beliefs impact on this research (Grbich, 2007:10).

“In the writing of every sentence I have felt the burden of the meaning of the whole bearing down on me but in the writing I did not know the whole” (Winter & Burroughs, 1989: 114). But by the end of the writing I have constructed meaning of my educational practice and professional identity and by living my values of care and agency have looked over my own conceptual horizons in the search of the whole. (Wolvaardt, 2013, p.358)

Qutoshi, S.B. (2016) *Creating living-educational-theory: a journey towards transformative teacher education in Pakistan*. Katmandu University, Nepal. Access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/sadruddin.shtml>

Qutoshi, while registered for his doctoral research in Nepal, was focussed on improving his practice, and that of others, in Pakistan:

This thesis illuminates my multilayered and emergent soulful-inquiry into the problem of culturally disempowering nature of teacher education which emerged by autobiographical excavation of my socio-pedagogical context. My aim in this research was to identify alternative ways of addressing research problem which invoked me to generate a host of research questions that came up with five key emergent themes of my inquiry: 1) Dictating and communicating views of leadership; 2) Narrowly conceived traditional view of curriculum images; 3) Conventional and somehow learner-centered pedagogies; 4) Assessment as ‘of’ learning and ‘for’ learning approaches; and 5) Objectivist and constraint pluralist research practices.

My purpose with these research themes was to demonstrate my embodied values through exploring, explaining and interpreting the themes arising from research questions, and to envision a transformative teacher education and research practices with reflexivity, inclusive logics, multiple genres and perspectival language as multiple ways of knowing...

...I used this epistemic praxis as professional development, and yet a morphing way of knowing the self and the culture/beyond, an approach that enabled me to generate new knowledge on cultural-contextual educative practices of teacher education and research endeavours.

These critical-creative epistemologies, in return, enabled me to recognize deep-rooted assumptions, expectations, beliefs and practices, and re/constructing them through scholarly interpretations and envisioning. Going through such soulful inquiry, making critical reflection on my own lived experiences, embracing pedagogical thoughtfulness, and yet accepting self as a change agent, my multidimensional inquiry offers five transformative visions for teacher education and research practices in Pakistan: 1) 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; 2) The metaphor of montage conceiving a liberating view of curriculum; 3) Critical-creative pedagogies for empowering view of education; 4) A holistic view of authentic-developmental assessment; and 5) An innovative-integral view of transformative research. These key learning outcomes are likely to bring emancipatory and transformative soul in the culturally embedded linear teacher education program. (Qutoshi, 2016, Abstract)

Glenn, M. (2006) *Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice*. University of Limerick, Ireland. Access from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/mairinglennphd.pdf>

Sullivan, B. (2006) *A living theory of a practice of social justice: Realising the right of Traveller Children to educational equality*. Limerick University. Access from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/sullivanPhD.pdf>

McDonagh, C. (2007) *My living theory of learning to teach for social justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realise our learning potentials?* Limerick University, Ireland. Access from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/McDonaghPhD.pdf>

Roche, M. (2007) *Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy: interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just community of enquiry*. Limerick University. Access from <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/rochePhD.pdf>

What I want to draw attention to is not only the theses of these teachers but also to the 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1998) they developed to provide each other with support and challenge on their doctoral journeys. What I particularly want to draw your attention to, are the relationships they developed and what happened after they all graduated. They have continued to engage in and support values-focussed professional development. For example, as well as contributing papers to the Educational Journal of Living Theories they have been very productive as evidenced, for example, by their numerous co-authored books and the establishment of the Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI), which contribute to the development of local, national and global equitable, inclusive education through values-focussed professional development.

Discussion

The argument has been many times for teachers, and other professional practitioners, to engage in Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development. For example, by Whitehead and Huxtable, (2015), in a paper published in *Gifted Education International*, titled, *Creating a profession of educators with the living-theories of master and doctor educators* and more recently in Whitehead and Huxtable (2024) in *Living Educational Theory Research as an Epistemology for Practice: The Role of Values in Practitioners' Professional Development*. Here I focus on discussing the implications for members of ISAAT and S-STEP.

Words not only describe a reality, they also bring into being a reality. So, I find it curious that so few concerned to improve the educational experiences, opportunities and relationships offered by institutions of Education clarify the meaning of the words they use; words such as those in the title and 'mission' statements of ISAAT and S-STEP SIG. The choice of words these organisations use to create their titles communicates the essence of their *raison d'être*, the meanings of which are extended in their various statements of purpose, mission or history:

The Purpose of the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching (ISATT):

- to promote, present, discuss and disseminate research on teachers and teaching;
- to gain more insight into these aspects of education;
- to add to knowledge and contribute to theory formation in this field;
- to enhance the quality of education through improved teaching and forms of professional development at all levels of education.

A central intention for this research is to focus on the way teachers themselves understand teaching and their own roles in it. Research is not limited to studying what teachers do but tries also to understand how they think and feel about what they are doing and the cultural contexts in which their work is embedded.

Consequently, research is individually as well as socially, psychologically and culturally based. (<https://www.isatt.net/the-purpose-of-isatt/>)

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) mission:

The American Educational Research Association (AERA), a national research society, strives to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good. (<https://www.aera.net/About-AERA>)

The Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices [S-STEP] Special Interest Group (SIG):

Self-study research emerged from groundbreaking work done in the early 1990s by a group of teacher educators who founded the S-STEP special interest group of the AERA. Since then, the field of self-study research and the self-study research community have continued to evolve and grow in new ways across wide-ranging educational and professional contexts.

Self-study research is initiated and conducted by teacher educators, teachers, and other practitioners who study their own practice to contribute to professional

learning, ways of knowing, and knowledge generation. Self-study research design has come to entail specific methodological components, including self-reflexivity, interaction with others, systematic and transparent process, and improvement-aimed exemplars. <https://www.aera.net/SIG109/Self-Study-of-Teacher-Education-Practices>)

It is taken for granted that all share a common understanding of words such as ‘education’, ‘teacher’, ‘educator’, ‘educational research’ and ‘professional’, and phrases such as ‘research to improve education and serve the public good’ and ‘enhance the quality of education through improved teaching and forms of professional development’. However, these words and phrases are given different meanings depending on who is using them, and the contexts and purposes of their use. This is particularly relevant to participants in this conference given the international membership of ISAAT and the S-STEP AERA SIG. Even within a country the standards by which teachers’ ‘educational practice’ are judged can vary. For example, the standards in Texas and California have to reflect the current national neoliberal political agenda and local social and cultural values. This can create a tension for teachers when they experience their embodied values and those of their local context contradicted by national values. Teachers in Finland and Italy, despite working in different countries, may experience less tension as they share what might be labelled as a European educational philosophy and values of collectivism and social responsibility.

Lakoff (2014) illustrates how words can be used to evoke deep frames to serve various social, cultural and political agendas. It is therefore important that before a teacher claims to be contributing to the development of equitable and inclusive education they are clear about the meaning they give to ‘education’ and their values as standards by which they judge improvement – their embodied meanings of values such as ‘equitable’ and ‘inclusive’, which are at the heart of the meaning of education as a process that “truly transforms lives in the world” (Education 2030 Incheon Declaration) and the *raison d’être* of ISAAT and the S-STEP AERA SIG.

Education is recognised internationally as a values laden process as indicated by the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015), GE2050: The European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (GENE, 2022) and the Magna Charta Universitatum Living Values Project (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum (n.d.)). The Magna Charta Universitatum lays out the values that universities globally are committed to in higher education. There are currently over 900 signatory universities.

There are many forms of values, as Crompton (2010), drawing on Schwartz (1992), points out. The values at the heart of European education are more those that Crompton summarises as ‘intrinsic’ rather than ‘extrinsic’. It follows that professional practitioners working in institutions of Education have a responsibility to improve their educational practice with values of human flourishing, help others do so too and contribute the knowledge they generate in the process to a global educational knowledgebase all may benefit from. By engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development teachers clarify and challenge the embodied meaning of the values of human flourishing they use to evaluate the effectiveness of their practice and as explanatory principles in their explanations for their educational influences in the learning of the institution of Education that is the context of their practice to realise its educational purpose, in the learning of those who comprise it and in their own learning and development as a professional practitioner.

Being a professional practitioner is more than being an expert in a field of practice, doing what you are told by whoever you work for, such as a government, professional body or organisation, and complying with their ethical statements. It includes taking responsibility for: what you do; the decisions you make; the consequences of what you do; testing your claims to know and be improving what you are doing with values of human flourishing; contributing to the evolution of global knowledge of individual people and collectives learning to flourish and helping others to do so too, and to Humanity learning to flourish as a benign presence in the world.

The doctoral thesis of Mounter, Russell, Wolverhaardt, Quotoshi and Glenn, Sullivan, McDonagh and Roache serve to illustrate how, by researching their practice to understand and improve it, and creating their living-educational-theories, teachers working in diverse cultural, social and political contexts are able to realise their responsibilities to the institution of Education that is the context of their practice, and to themselves as teachers and professional practitioners. As you read their theses you will find evidence for the educational influence they have in their own learning and that of their pupils/students and the social formations that form the context of their practice. By making their thesis public they are contributing to the growth of an educational epistemology and so bring into being global equitable, inclusive education which creates a better world.

Conclusion

I have presented an evidence-based explanation of how self-study practitioner-researchers contribute to the development of education, research, pedagogical practices and policies with values of human flourishing, “to ensure that education truly transforms lives in the world” (Education 2030 Incheon Declaration). I have sought to make the argument that teachers, by engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as their values-focussed professional development, can contribute to the growth of educational knowledge and theory formation, improving the quality of equitable and inclusive teaching practices at all levels of education locally, nationally and globally. I look forward to learning from what emerges from your exploration of the implications for improving your practice as a professional educator by engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as continual professional development, helping others to do so too and contributing the knowledge you generate in the process to a global knowledgebase “to ensure that education truly transforms lives in the world” (UNESCO, 2015).

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