

## **Living Theory research: Making a difference that matters to Educational Learning and Continual Professional Development**

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### **Abstract**

There is considerable pressure on professional educators to develop instruction and support for learners to acquire skills and knowledge determined by a 'given' curriculum with prescribed learning outcomes. Less attention is given to professional educators improving their educational practice to support educational learning. Educational learning is an important component of a programme of study learners continually evolve to enable them to live as fully as possible, a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others. This paper presents ongoing research into supporting educational learning and the implications for professional educators of engaging in Living Theory research as a form of professional development.

A brief overview is given of Living Theory research as a form of educational practitioner self-study research. Doctorates and Masters of Living Theory researchers are drawn on to illustrate how, with courage and creativity, professional educational practitioners are improving the educational learning of their students and the wider learning community.

The discussion focuses on the influence engaging in Living Theory research has on educational-practitioners' creative professional learning and development as they live and work in contexts dominated by economic rationalism. It also addresses the significance of engaging in Living Theory research for professional educators.

### **Introduction**

There is considerable pressure on professional educators to develop instruction and support for learners to acquire skills and knowledge determined by a 'given' curriculum with prescribed programme of study and predefined learning outcomes. Comparatively less importance is given to them improving their educational practice supporting learners to create and progress through their ever-evolving personal curriculum. Whereas a curriculum vitae is a retrospective account of the course of a life lived, here I am talking about an ever-evolving personal curriculum a person creates for themselves from past and present experiences and learning to identify practical steps they need to take to realise imagined possibilities of a future having lived as fully as possible, a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others.

This paper is part of ongoing research into supporting educational learning and focuses on the implications for professional educators of engaging in Living Theory research as a form of professional development. A brief overview is

given of Living Theory research, a values and action led form of practitioner-research, for educational-practitioners asking questions such as:

- 'How do I enable my students to learn educationally while gaining the highest grades possible on tests?
- 'What educational influence am I having in my own learning, the learning of other people, and the learning of the organisation or community that I am part of?'
- 'How do I fulfil my professional responsibility to create and contribute to a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all?'

Doctorates and Masters of Living Theory researchers are drawn on to illustrate how, with courage and creativity, professional educational practitioners are improving the educational learning of their students and the wider learning community. These accounts are also drawn on to illustrate how Living Theory meets the highest standards of rigour the Academy sets for research. Current work of Living Theory researchers is introduced to bring to the attention of readers opportunities that are being developed which extend the educational influence of the knowledge created by those engaging in this form of professional creative learning and development.

The originality of the knowledge generated is in the contribution it makes to both educational theory and to improving educational practice in diverse fields and contexts of knowledge that emerge as educational practitioners engage in Living Theory research as a form of continual professional development (CPD).

The discussion focuses on the influence engaging in Living Theory research has on educational practitioners' creative professional learning and development to improve educational learning as they live and work in contexts dominated by economic rationalism. It also addresses the significance of engaging in Living Theory research for the profession of educators.

The paper is organised as follows:

- What differences do I, as a professional educator, want to make that matter to me?
- Educational CPD as a process of creative professional learning and development
- Overview of Living Theory research as a form of educational practitioner research that makes a difference to educational learning.
- Implications for professional educators of engaging in Living Theory research as a form of CPD
- Ongoing Living Theory research into supporting educational learning
- Discussion

## **What differences do I, as a professional educator, want to make that matters to me?**

I believe people, including myself, have a responsibility to engage in learning life-long to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others. This is more than 'learning' as an activity that a person engages in that leads to a change in, for instance, their behaviour, thinking, praxis, way of being, skilled performance, subject knowledge. The learning to which I refer here is 'educational learning', by which I mean a change, an improvement, a learner makes with regard to their ability to live a loving, satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others.

As they engage in educational learning a person takes care to identify the consequences of what they do in order to try to ensure the consequences for themselves, others and us all, is at least benign and holds the hope of contributing to the flourishing of humanity; the flourishing of our individual and collective humanity and the flourishing of Humanity (our species). Educational learning therefore has an ethical dimension. Educational learning is concerned with learning to live in a complex world with other people and make a worthwhile contribution to the flourishing of all, which by necessity includes contributing to the flourishing of other life-forms and the planet we all inhabit and are part of.

A professional educator has a responsibility to both enhance a learner's ability to progress through a 'given' curriculum (the programme of study given by the institution or organisation the learner is registered with) *and* to contribute to a learner's educational learning. A professional educator also has a responsibility as a professional. There are well-established hallmarks that distinguish a profession:

... a common clearly formulated knowledge base; moral and ethical commitment to clients, and continuous development of knowledge by members of professions connecting profession-wide knowledge to their unique contexts. (Pantić, 2011, P.9)

So, professional educators, have a responsibility as professionals, to continually research to understand and improve their own educational practice with respect to the education of individuals as progress through both a given curriculum and a curriculum that contributes to their educational learning. As a professional they also have a responsibility to contribute to evolving a global knowledgebase of educational theory and practice and to contribute to the development and implementation of local, national and international policies that impact on educational learning. Professional educators therefore research their educational practice to understand and improve it with respect to the core principles of education, as part of their programme of continual professional development (CPD). Reiss and White (2003) illustrate my meaning by their proposal that schools and the Government develop an aims-led curriculum that reflects educational principles of education. They describe these educational principles in terms of enabling a person to learn:

- to lead a life that is personally flourishing,
- to help others to do so, too. (p.1)

A learner is not here seen as a passive receiver of knowledge but as someone actively engaged in the process of learning to acquire and create knowledge of the world, themselves and themselves in and of the world. To actively engage in the process of learning demands courage and creativity. A dictionary definition of courage, 'mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty' is the meaning I am giving to 'courage' here. I believe it takes courage to leave the safety of established territory of what is known to critically and creatively engage with both what has been created as well as that which is in the process of being created, and to test the validity of the new knowledge. 'Creativity' has many different meanings in common parlance and various realms of discourse. I again refer to the dictionary to clarify my meaning of 'creativity' in the context of this paper. I believe it requires creativity, 'the ability to create, to bring into existence', 'the ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas', and it takes courage to develop that ability.

I now want to focus on my meaning of educational CPD as a process of creative professional learning and development.

### **Educational CPD as a process of creative professional learning and development**

I said at the start that I believe everybody has a personal responsibility to engage in educational learning. Realising that personal responsibility should be of considerable importance to a professional educator and form a core of their programme of continual professional development (CPD).

CPD has many aspects. A professional educator needs to keep abreast of knowledge generated with respect to fulfilling the demands of their various roles, such as instructor, mentor, teacher... that are encapsulated in the role of professional educator. For instance, their CPD programme needs to enable them to keep up to date with changes in given curricula and associated legislation and policies, and developments in the theories and practices of teaching and learning and the research in the associated strands of the social and physical sciences and humanities. One aspect however that is often overlooked, or cast to one side to wait for those illusive 'when there is time' moments, is the obligation the professional educator has to create and contribute their knowledge to a global educational knowledgebase and not to only to access it. That is what I mean by educational CPD. The aspect of their CPD programme where they take seriously their professional responsibility to actively engage in the creative process of learning and generating valid knowledge as contributions to a global educational knowledgebase through researching questions such as:

- 'How do I enable my students to learn educationally while gaining the highest grades possible on tests?
- 'What educational influence am I having in my own learning, the learning of other people, and the learning of the organisation or community that I am part of?'

- 'How do I fulfil my professional responsibility to create and contribute to a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all?'

One distinguishing feature of educational; learning, knowledge, practice, research or curriculum, is the integration of life-affirming and life-enhancing values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity as explanatory principles and evaluative standards of practice. Living Theory research therefore offers a way for professional educators to realise their responsibility as educational-practitioners to improve their practice and their responsibility as professional educators to contribute to, as well as benefit from, a global educational knowledge base.

### **Overview of Living Theory research as a form of educational practitioner research that makes a difference to educational learning**

Living Theory research is a form of educational practitioner research engaged in to address questions of the form, 'how do I improve what I am doing?' with the intention of improving practice and contributing validated knowledge to an educational knowledgebase through disciplined enquiry.

Everyone does many things. People engage in many activities, all of which serve one or more purposes. However, activities are not synonymous with practice with respect to practitioner research. My understanding of 'practice' practitioner researchers are concerned with researching to improve is similar, but not identical, to that described by Chaiklin (2007):

From a cultural-historical perspective a practice can be seen as arising in response to general demands of societal need. A practice can be conceptualized as a historically developed and conditioned tradition of action for addressing societally formed needs.

This quote from Chaiklin illustrates improvement in practice judged with respect to standards predefined by an organisation or the community within which the practitioner works and/or lives. For instance, a schoolteacher may judge the quality of their practice by their students' exam scores. However, I contest that practitioners have a responsibility to question the purposes served by their practice and the standards by which it is judge from the perspective of the contribution their practice makes to enhance the possibility of our individual and collective flourishing in a humane world. For instance, a schoolteacher, as a professional educator, has a responsibility to help their students pass exams with high grades and they also need to ensure that in the process their students do not learn to become proficient passive recyclers of knowledge, who have lost confidence in themselves as knowledge creators, able to create knowledge and contribute to their own learning and life and that of others.

Living theory research is a is a form of educational practitioner self-study research. Whitehead (2019) summarises and distinguishes between an individual's living-educational-theory and Living Theory research as follows:

Living-educational-theories are the explanations that individuals produce to explain their educational influences in their own learning in the

learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding. Living Theory research is the conceptual framework that enables individual practitioner-researchers to locate their enquiries within this research approach. It is important to understand that no living-educational-theory can be generated from the conceptual framework of Living Theory research. Each living-educational-theory is unique to the individual and distinguished by the unique constellation of values that the individual uses as explanatory principles in their explanation of their educational influence in learning. In traditional theories, the behaviour of an individual is explained through a process of deduction from the general concepts of the theory to the individual case that is subsumed by the theory.

Living Theory research arose from the concern of Whitehead working on CPD that could support educators as practitioners to improve their practice *and* to fulfil their responsibilities as professionals to create and contribute valid knowledge to a global educational knowledgebase. The titles of two of his earlier papers serve to illustrate my point: 'Improving Learning in Schools – an In-Service Problem' (Whitehead, 1977), and 'In-Service Education: The knowledgebase of Educational Theory' (Whitehead, 1980). These quotation still succinctly communicate the fundamental principles of Living Theory research:

I shall argue that a form of in-service education, which is based on a teacher's practice, should be the knowledge base of educational theory. My central point is simple. I am saying that by reflecting on their practical attempts to answer questions of the form, 'How do I improve this process of education here?', individual teachers will be able to construct explanations which correspond to their educational practice. I am saying that it is the aggregate of these explanations which constitute educational theory.

... The practical activity of education is value-laden. To pick out a process as education requires value judgements.

(Whitehead, 1980, p.89)

Living Theory research is inherently ethical. As the practitioner engages in Living Theory research they clarify their embodied values in the course of the research. The values at the heart of Living Theory research that form the researcher's principles and standards, by which they explain and evaluate their practice, are not abstract notions to be applied. They are the real and lived expressions of the life-affirming and life-enhancing principles of what gives the educator's practice and life meaning and purpose. The Living Theory researcher collects data in various forms, such as video and audio recordings of their practice and reflective conversations with students and colleagues, journal entries and email correspondence, to help them clarify the embodied values expressed in their practice. They interrogate the data asking questions such as, 'what values am I expressing' and 'what values do I want to see myself expressing?' as Whitehead describes in his most quoted paper:

My insights about the nature of educational theory have been influenced by viewing video-tapes of my classroom practice. I could see that the 'I' in the question 'How do I improve this process of education here?', existed as a living contradiction. By this I mean that 'I' contained two mutually exclusive opposites, the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation. (Whitehead, 1989)

This gives rise to further questions, most often, 'What can I do to live my values more fully in my practice'. Sometimes that leads to the educator formulating a plan to change their practice with their students if they recognise themselves living a contradiction. Other times it may lead the educator to formulate a plan to help them resolve the tensions of working and living in a context where they feel their values are at odds with, for instance, the organisation or community within which they live and work.

A few educators, like Sanja Lišnjić, are prepared to ask and answer deeply personally challenging questions, which she explains in her keynote address 'How I changed my educational values and practice through action research', at the CARN-ALARA 2019 Conference held in Split, Croatia. The video recording, which can be accessed from <https://youtu.be/t8tFTBOsdJY> is only 6 minutes long and well worth watching as Sanja communicates so much through her embodied expression of her meanings together with words, images and videos extracts. Sanja illustrates how as the research progresses further data is collected to enable the researcher to see whether they are making improvements in the direction of the values that are forming their evaluative standards of judgment and to evolve their plans of action accordingly.

As their research progresses a Living Theory researcher tests the validity of the knowledge they are creating in the form of their living-educational-theory. A living-educational-theory is the phrase coined by Whitehead in 1989 to mean a practitioner-researcher's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formation within which they are living and working formulated in the process of researching their educational practice to understand and improve it. The most comprehensive and up-to-date exposition can be found in Whitehead (2018), 'Living Theory research as a way of life' and his 18 minutes TEDx talk in 2019, which can be accessed from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jf1kFHLdiPY>.

In the course of a person's life their practice may change. However, as the title of Whitehead's 2018 book, *Living Theory research as a way of life*, implies, Living Theory research may come to be an ongoing process, a way of life, for many. Many people may also engage at some point in their life in a study of their 'self' to understand their motivations and how they want to live. As they engage in self-enquiry to identify their practice, or even as they research into their practice, they may create theories (living or otherwise) of their life. However, a living-educational-theory and a 'theory of life' are different forms of knowledge. The knowledge generated as a living-educational-theory is in the form of evidence and a rational argument that can be subjected to inter-subjective criticism through a rigorous process of peer validation, and the contribution it makes to an educational knowledgebase and to the knowledge base of the practitioner's

field of practice. The doctoral thesis of Arianna Briganti (2019, under examination), 'My living-theory of international development', exemplifies this point. Her thesis makes an original contribution to a global educational knowledgebase and to the field of International Development. I return to this point in the next section.

As professional educators submit accounts of their living-educational-theory research to peer-reviewed journals or present them at conferences or submit them as part of a university course for accreditation, they both contribute to a global knowledgebase and further test the validity and rigour of their research and their explanation of their educational influence in learning. I will draw in the next section on Doctorates and Masters to illustrate the implications for the professional educator of engaging in Living Theory research.

### **Implications for professional educators of engaging in Living Theory research as a form of CPD**

During the course of their research, as well as when preparing an account, a Living Theory researcher presents their research periodically to critical peers and asks them to help strengthen their research and test the validity and rigour of their claims. This enables a researcher to develop their research far better than can be done alone, as the account by Peggy Kok in the, 'Bluffers Guide', (Whitehead, 1995) illustrates. Engaging with peers in this way also contributes to the learning of others and a community of educational researchers. A great deal is often learned that progresses ones own learning in the process of helping another with theirs and together we can create more than each can create alone.

The embodied values that form the practitioner-researcher's explanatory principles in their explanations of the educational influence in learning and offer evaluative standards by which they judge improvement in their practice, are identified, clarified and critically engaged with by the practitioner as they research their educational practice to improve and explain it in terms of values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. That is a different, albeit related matter, to either justifying values that they claim explain their actions or activities or give meaning and purpose to their lives. Sometimes, someone may engage in a form of self-enquiry in order to identify their practice, which they then go on to research to understand and improve it and generate their living-educational-theory. The paper by Giulia Carozzi, 'A self-enquiry: towards the development of my living-theory educational research' (2019, pending publication)' illustrates the point.

Living Theory research is a form of educational practitioner self-study research to answer questions of the form, 'how can I improve the process of education here?' I want to be clear that I do not mean a psychological form of study of self, but a form of practitioner self-study research with its origins in teacher self-study research. Psychological forms of self study, as exemplified by different psychoanalytic enquiries, are to answer questions of the form, 'who am?', 'Who do I want to be or become?', 'How can I improve my self-care?' Such questions are important but are not questions for educational practitioner self-study research. However, as a practitioner engages in Living Theory research they may come to know them self and their practice better and critically appraise them self



and the values they want to live more fully. Such knowledge may influence what 'practice' they want to give their time and energy to.

What 'practice' is the Living Theory researcher researching? I am taking it that everyone has many practices, recognised or not. However, not all actions and activities constitute 'practice'. The practice that a Living Theory researcher is researching into may be 'located' in many fields of practice. For instance, it may be in the field of practice of an artist, mathematician, shop worker, engineer, street cleaner, community activist, parent, entrepreneur. The 'practice' is understood here as what a person does to fulfil the responsibilities of their 'role'. It is not the 'field' or activities that 'defines' the practice but the 'role' that clarifies the associated practice. I do not intend here to go into the literature on 'role'. I simply wish to point to my use of 'role' as having a meaning in terms of a relationship between self, others and social formations, as Mounter (2019) represents as ~i~we~I~us~.

'Role' in sociology defines the actions, whereas here I mean it is what a practitioner does in that role that identifies their practice and further shapes the meaning of their 'role'. It is that meaning of 'practice', what it is they do to realise in practice that role, I am using when I point to the practice a practitioner-researcher is concerned to continually develop. It is that practice that a Living Theory researcher researches to understand and improve and in the process research into their educational practice to understand and improve it and generate their living-educational-theory. When I say they research to 'understand' their practice I do not mean to they generate stories to account for why they engage in that practice. I mean they look into what they are doing to see what they are doing in the here and now to develop an understanding of what they are doing that is commensurate with their role and what is not.

It is not uncommon when people examine what they are doing to find that at least some of what they do is not practice associated with their role and can sometimes serve as distraction. For instance, a Chief Education Officer I knew many years ago checked staff travel claims in such detail that he would ask why a journey one day was a mile longer than on another day. It was not only a waste of his time as CEO but it also added to the work of those who worked for him. It is beholden to a professional practitioner to research their practice to understand what their practice is, enhance their mastery and of it, learn how to improve it and make public the validated (rigorously tested) knowledge they generate in the course of their research.

Living Theory research challenges the professional practitioner to confront and deal with ethical dilemmas and take responsibility for the consequences of their practice by researching their role related practice to understand and improve it. At the same time it challenges the practitioner to research their educational practice to recognise, understand and improve it by generating and testing the validity of their explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in.

Educational-practice is distinct from a role related practice. As they research their role related practice to understand and improve it my claim is that each

professional educator, should also, as an educational practitioner, research their educational-practice to understand and improve it and generate an explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations they live and work in. As Living Theory research is concerned with both researching to understand and improve both role related practice and educational practice, and generating valid contributions to a global educational knowledge base, it offers a research methodology that should form a part of the CPD of all practitioners, and most obviously that of professional educators.

The doctorates, which can be accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net>, offer numerous examples of professional educators generating knowledge as they engage in Living Theory research as a form of professional development with their contributions to a global educational knowledgebase recognised and legitimated by reputable universities around the world. The following Doctorates and Masters of Living Theory researchers, a few of many, have been drawn on here to illustrate how, with courage and creativity, professional educational practitioners are improving the educational learning of their students and the wider learning community.

Joy Mounter in the UK successfully completed her Masters as her roles changed from primary school class teacher, to deputy head, to head teacher:

1. *How Can I Live My Personal Theory Of Education In The Classroom To Promote Self Reflection As A Learner?* First Educational Enquiry Unit, 2006.  
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounteree.htm>
2. *Language Of Learning To The Language Of Educational Responsibility.* Second Educational Enquiry Unit, 2006.  
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounteree207.pdf>
3. *If I Want The Children In My Class To Extend Their Thinking And Develop Their Own Values And Learning Theories, How Can I Show The Development Of Their Learning? How Do I Research This In My Classroom?* Research Methods Unit, 2007.  
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounterrme07.pdf>
4. *How Can I Work Within The Government's Perspective Of 'Gifted And Talented' But Still Remain True To My Own Living Values?* Gifted and Talented Unit, 2008.  
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/jmgt2008opt.pdf>
5. *'How can I enhance the educational influence of my pupils in their own learning, that of other pupils, myself and the school?'* Third Educational Enquiry Unit, 2008
6. <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounteree3.pdf>
7. *Can Children Carry Out Action Research About Learning, Creating Their Own Learning Theory?* Understanding Learning and Learners Unit, 2008.  
<https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounterull.pdf>

8. *As A Headteacher Researcher How Can I Demonstrate The Impact And Self-Understandings Drawn From Living Theory Action Research, As A Form Of Continual Professional Development In Education?* MA Dissertation, 2012. <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/module/joymounterma.pdf>

She is currently registered on a Doctoral programme researching her practices in Higher Education in the roles of Designated Safeguarding Lead, MA and Leadership Course Leader, Leadership Apprenticeship Lead and Module Tutor Level 4,5,6,7. Her most recent work can be accessed from her website <http://www.spanglefish.com/allicanbe/>

Mark Potts, also in the UK, in the role of deputy head of a secondary school completed his Masters and Doctorate, 'How can I Reconceptualise International Educational Partnerships as a Form of 'Living Citizenship'?' (Potts, 2012) Now as community activist he is continuing to research his practice as a Living Theory researcher and contribute to a global educational knowledge in the form of publications such as Potts, (2019) and a co-authored book (Coombs, Potts & Whitehead, 2014)

Swaroop Rawal in India researching her practice as drama teacher, successfully submitted her Doctorate, 'The Role Of Drama In Enhancing Life Skills In Children With Specific Learning Difficulties In A Mumbai School: My Reflective Account. (Rawal, 2006) Swaroop continues to engage in Living Theory research, publish and present at international conference and run workshop worldwide as her CPD of her practice as teacher, teacher educator, curriculum developer and national education strategist.

Máirín Glenn in Ireland, having been awarded her Doctorate, 'Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice' (Glen, 2006) has gone on to work with other professional educators and Living Theory researchers, Caitriona McDonagh, Mary Roche, Bernie Sullivan to create NEARI (Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland) and continues to publish and present her research at international conferences such as the British Educational Research Association annual conference and the Collaborative Action Research Network/Action Learning Action Research Association.

Living Theory research is not limited to use by professional educational practitioners working in Education. JeKan Adler Colins, researched his practice as nurse educator in Japan, created and successfully submitted his Doctoral thesis, 'Developing an inclusional pedagogy of the unique: How do I clarify, live and explain my educational influences in my learning as I pedagogise my healing nurse curriculum in a Japanese University?' (Alder Colins, 2007).

Living Theory research is also used by those roles other than that of professional educator. For instance, Phil Tattersal researching his practice as an environmental activist in Tasmania , successfully submitted his Doctorate, 'How am I generating a living theory of environmental activism with inclusionality?'. (Tattersal, 2011) Graham van Tuyl in UK, as a change agent, engaged in Living Theory research as he said:

... motivated by my desire to understand what it is a Change Agent actually does. Change Agents work in a variety of ways, and have a variety of organizational experiences in helping to create change. Over the years I have become more aware that there is no single body of theory that combines and explains the practical and theoretical approaches that can be taken in Change Management.

He successfully submitted his Doctoral thesis, 'From Engineer To Co-Creative Catalyst; An Inclusional And Transformational Journey.' (Van Tuyl, 2009)

There are also numerous living-educational-theory research accounts submitted for publication to peer reviewed journals (see those for instances in EJOLTs, the Educational Journal of Living Theories). The Masters, Doctorates and published papers all show the implications for professional educational practitioners who have the creativity and courage to engage in Living Theory research as a form of CPD in a world dominated by economic rationalism.

### **Ongoing Living Theory research into supporting educational learning**

Examples of the form of support for educational learning that Living Theory researchers are researching into, in order to improve it include:

- The MA: Values-led Leadership, devised by Joy Mounter and validated by Newman University, UK - see <http://www.spanglefish.com/allicanbe/mavalues-ledleadership.asp>
- Living Theory post doc and research SKYPE groups – see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/skypegps0619.pdf>
- The democracy cafés run by Mark Potts - How can I live my life as a living-global-citizen? From action research to political activism - see Potts (2019 in press)
- The work for which Swaroop Rawal was awarded an honorary DLitt by Worcester University – see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/swaroop0619.pdf>
- National research groups such as NEARI – see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/neari0619.pdf>
- Living-posters developing connections and spreading educational knowledge, theory, practice and opportunities that contribute to the flourishing of humanity – see <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage0619.pdf>
- Living Theory Wiki created by Peter Mellet offering an alternative channel into the understanding of Living Theory research, taking advantage of the hyperlinked relationship between ideas and people's educational conversations – see [http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main_Page)
- The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) a free and open access online peer reviewed journal providing resources and a supportive

educational community – see <http://ejolts> and the Virtual Space for Cooperation at <https://ejolts.org/>

## Discussion

The discussion is framed by the guiding questions of the IPDA conference the paper was presented at:

- What is creativity in the context of professional learning? Do we need it?
- What are the associated risks and benefits? for practitioners? for professional identities? for learners? for pedagogies? for research and researchers?
- Is there a relationship between creativity and resilience?

*What is creativity in the context of professional learning? Do we need it?*

I have argued that as a professional, a practitioner has a responsibility to not only acquire knowledge but to also create it and contribute to their professional knowledgebase. That requires practitioners to engage critically and creatively with the learning of others and their own. Given that understanding of 'creativity' in the context of professional learning I cannot see how we can do without it.

*What are the associated risks and benefits?*

Living Theory research presents risks and benefits for professional learning across the professions in times dominated by economic rationalism. I have spelt out at length the benefits of professional practitioners including Living Theory research in their CPD programme.

There is a risks of identifying, in the course of the research where things are not going as well as they could. To report on 'imperfect' performance before 'remedied' or to make public failed attempts to improve practice is to risk ridicule by peers and loss of employment. The risk of identifying and speaking out where values, that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity are denied in practice, carries similar risks as evidence by the way 'whistle blowers' are treated.

The other risk is an existential one. Many people need courage and a strong sense of ontological security and confidence to deal creatively and productively when they experience themselves as a living contradiction, in the sense of holding a value and at the same time negating it. Various strategies are used to defend the 'self' when such experiences are potentially psychologically damaging, such as those detailed by Eric Berne in, '*Games People Play*'. (Berne, 1964). These can be to the detriment of both the individual and others in the community of practice they affiliate themselves to.

Living Theory researchers are concerned with improving practice, in the direction of values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity, located in the world in which we live, not an ephemeral, idealistic world. Hence the importance of contextualising the practice that is being researched. That context is

comprised of a complex ecology, which includes socio-cultural and socio-historical influences. A very powerful global influence is that of economic rationalism, the extent of which is described well by McTaggart in 1992, so I quote at length:

... the new 'economic rationalism' is a worldwide phenomena which 'guides' not only the conduct of transnational corporations, but governments and their agencies as well. It does so with increasing efficacy and pervasiveness. I use the term 'guides' here in quotes to make a particular point. Economic rationalism is not merely a term which suggests the primacy of economic values. It expresses commitment to those values in order to serve particular sets of interests ahead of others. Furthermore, it disguises that commitment in a discourse of 'economic necessity' defined by its economic models. We have moved beyond the reductionism which leads all questions to be discussed as if they were economic ones (de-valuation) to a situation where moral questions are denied completely (de-moralisation) in a cult of economic inevitability (as if greed had nothing to do with it). Broudy (1981) has described 'de-valuation' and de-moralization' in the following way:

De-valuation refers to diminishing or denying the relevance of all but one type of value to an issue; de-moralization denies the relevance of moral questions. The reduction of all values – intellectual, civic, health, among others – to a money value would be an example of de-valuation; the slogan 'business' is business' is an example of de-moralization (Broudy, 1981: 99)

(McTaggart, 1992, p. 50).

One of the purposes of formal Education, within which many professional educators practice, is to equip people to perform tasks at an identified level of proficiency and to confer qualifications.

Economic rationalism is rooted in notions of individualism, which is not concerned with ethical considerations. Living Theory research however demands the researcher take responsibility for improving their practice in terms of values that carry hope for the flourishing of not only their own humanity, but also how they contribute to the possibilities for the flourishing of the humanity of other people and the flourishing of Humanity able to live humanely in a sustaining world. This ethical demand of Living Theory research has implications for practitioners reprising their professional identities and responsibilities, their pedagogy, the research they draw on to inform their practice and their expectations of themselves and the learners they are in an educational relationship with.

*Is there a relationship between creativity and resilience?*

Humans are great storytellers. They tell stories all the time to account for why, how and what they do. The stories they create shape what they do, their actions and practices, as Ben Okri, writes:

15) Nations and people are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings.  
Okri (1996, p.21)

I do not think nations or people (for the most part) intend to tell stories that are lies nor do I think there is a single, story that is the 'truth'. However, some stories are blight filled, others are not. I think we can choose which we tell. I prefer to tell stories that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. Such stories are not necessarily all happy. Some may be painful to tell and hear and it may take considerable determination, skill and creativity for some stories to be told and engaged with by people to create new stories that can contribute to the flourishing of our individual and collective humanity as Edith Eger (2017) says:

What happened can never be forgotten and can never be changed. But over time I learned that I can choose how to respond to the past. I can be miserable, or I can be hopeful – I can be depressed, or I can be happy. We always have that choice, that opportunity for control. *I'm here, this is now*, I have learned to tell myself, over and over until the panicky feeling begins to ease. (p. 7).

It is the same with data collected and what use is made of it to enhance learning as Barry Hymer wrote:

When a child does something correctly, she's had a chance to practise something. When she makes a mistake, she has a chance to learn something. (Barry Hymer personal email 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2007)

Hymer's Doctoral thesis, (Hymer 2007) also illustrates the power of story and how the story being created brings a recognition of what has been overlooked.

The stories we tell evolve with the telling but we commonly embellish them to 'defend' our 'self' and make them more resistant to challenge. I have found people often resist and resent critical engagement with their ideas or their stories. They take it they are being criticized as a person and create strategies to defend themselves and keep their stories safe from change. Being resilient, being able to bounce back is often lauded as an admirable quality. However, perhaps we need a word that communicates an ability to learn how to bounce forward, to create new, better stories, from the ruins of thwarted effort. What has this to do with Living Theory research? Whitehead puts it well in his review of Edith Eger's book, *The Choice*:

I know that most of our experiences in life, as we generate our living-educational-theories, cannot be compared to Auschwitz in which some 1.1 million people died during the four-and-a-half years of its existence; one million of them were Jewish men, women and children. However, Edith Eger's response to what happened to her with her focus on the centrality of choice, in learning how to respond to the past, has a

resonance with the choice of personal knowledge in generating a living-educational-theory. I am thinking of our choices in responding to the recognition of Polanyi's (1958) "... the crippling mutilations imposed by an objectivist framework." (p. 381) and of our choice "... to understand the world from our point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising our personal judgement responsibly with universal intent." (p. 327). (Whitehead, EJOLTs...)

So, in answer to the question do I think there is *a relationship between creativity and resilience?* ... it rather depends on what is meant by 'resilience'. The Living Theory research referred to in this paper provides plenty of evidence for how practitioner researchers can create valid narratives to explain their educational influence in learning as they creatively and critically engage with the stories of ruin and success they create as they research their practice to understand and improve it and contribute knowledge to a global knowledgebase that carries hope for the flourishing of humanity. The narratives are valid in the sense that the evidence offered to support the knowledge claims is open to inter-subjective criticism and 'mutual rational control by critical discussion' (Popper, 1975, p.44)

#### *To conclude*

The purpose of this paper has been to offer a persuasive argument that engaging in Living Theory research enhances practitioners' creative professional learning and development to improve educational learning. I have provided examples of the difference it makes to practice in the real world we all live and work in which is dominated by economic rationalism and to shown the significance of engaging in Living Theory research for professional practitioners working in different contexts and roles. I leave it to you to engage, critically, creatively and with imagination, with what I have offered and decide whether to try Living Theory research for yourself to make a difference that matters to your educational learning and continual professional development.

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