

Professional educators accepting their professional responsibilities today and in times to come: A Living Educational Theory research approach.

Marie Huxtable, University of Cumbria

Abstract

Teachers around the world, whether they work with children, young people or adults, are faced with the challenge of fulfilling their responsibilities as a professional educator to improve the quality of education for their pupils/students *and* contribute to the growth of the educational knowledge of their profession. They also face the challenges, as an employee, of contributing to the realisation of the visions, missions and goals of their employer.

Improving Education necessitates employing well-qualified professional educators who can contribute to the growth of an educated citizenship of 2030 and beyond. Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their continuing professional development offers a way forward for teachers, and other educational practitioners, to create answers to the practical daily problems they face *and* fulfil all their educational responsibilities as *professional* educational practitioners *and* to realise their civic responsibilities as employees. These responsibilities include: researching their practice to improve it and contributing to improving Education and professional educational practice in their current situation and; contributing to a global educational knowledgebase to develop Education and the role of the teacher as a professional in 2030 and beyond for the benefit of all.

The paper illustrates the implications for professional educational practitioners, working in diverse contexts worldwide, of engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as life-long continuing professional development. The implications include making contributions to enhancing the process, structures and organisation of Education and the role of teachers as professionals in the present and future.

Introduction

As the words, 'education', 'teacher' and 'professional' have many meanings I begin this paper by clarifying the meaning I give to 'education', 'teacher' and 'professional' to set the context for clarifying what I contend distinguishes a teacher's practice as that of a professional educator. In the second section I go on to consider some of the challenges teachers, as professional educators, have to face in an evolving global context.

Some challenges teachers face are unique to their particular context. However, I contend that the challenges educators experience, with a vision of education as a life-long values-laden process, are more similar than different, irrespective of the variety of eras and cultures within which they practice. In the third section of this paper I illustrate how engaging in Living Educational Theory research, as continuing professional development, has enabled teachers, worldwide, to free themselves of the imposition of theories, knowledge and dominant ideologies to improve the educational quality of education in their context.

In the last section of the paper I summarise the essential and unique contribution teachers, by developing their professionalism, can make to the flourishing of their professional community. I conclude by outlining some of the implications for teachers of adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their continuing professional development. This includes how they can contribute to enhancing the process, structures and organisation of Education and the role of teachers as professionals in the present and future.

1. Clarifying what distinguishes a teacher's practice as that of a professional educator.

'Education' is often taken to be synonymous with, for example, training, schooling, or giving and receiving instruction. Many people situated in different contexts and eras have distinguished a meaning of the word 'education' as a life-long educational process, for example, Dewey (*Democracy and Education*, 1916) in the USA, A.N. Whitehead (*Aims of Education*, 1929) in the UK and Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1968) in Brazil. For me Ginott (1997) put it into words, which, for me, evoke the values-laden nature of education as a life-long process:

“What is the goal of education?” [Ginott] would ask, “When all is said and done, we want children to grow up to be decent human beings, a ‘*mensch*’, a person with compassion, commitment, and caring. (p.10)

As did Reiss and White (2013) in, ‘An Aims-based Curriculum: The Significance of Human Flourishing for Schools’:

What are schools for? In very general terms, their aims are the same as those of a home with children. The task of both institutions is two-fold and simplicity itself, to equip each child:

- to lead a life that is personally flourishing,

- to help others to do so, too. (p.1)

The same can be said for learners of any age.

Many of the policy, strategy and curriculum documents produced by Government departments currently appear to conceive of 'education' as a much more limited activity. Gaining skills and qualifications and acquiring and creating knowledge is important for adults as well as children but only, to paraphrase Ginott, if they serve to enable us to grow as decent human beings.

That takes me to education as a lifelong values-laden process of learning to live a loving life, which is satisfying, productive and worthwhile for self and others, "Values are what we hold to be important. Beliefs are what we hold to be true." CWDC, (2007). The values to which I refer are those that, as Jack Whitehead (reference?) says, "carry hope for the flourishing of humanity". When I think of values that carry hope for the 'flourishing of humanity' I think of the dictionary definition: "...compassionate, sympathetic, or generous behavior or disposition; the quality or state of being humane ... the quality or state of being human. This connects for me with a notion of Humanity as "... the totality of human beings" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanity>)

I see Humanity as a global social formation that transcends time and place, to which we each can contribute to its' flourishing. I say ' a global social formation that transcends time and place' because I believe that values such as compassion and generosity are universal and not culturally bound. Different societies may have different ways of expressing humanitarian values but it is the values we hold in common not our differences that defines what a human being, being human means. It follows then that a key responsibility of a teacher as a professional educator is to contribute to improving the quality of the educational experiences, opportunities and relationships they and their employer are providing for learners, whatever their age.

To be professional includes an educator accepting personal responsibility for holding them self to account according to their own values as well as ethical standards of the social formation and society within which the practice can be understood. It also includes contributing to the growth of educational knowledge for the flourishing of Humanity. A professional practitioner:

- Continues to study to extend their cognitive range and concern
- Keeps up-to-date with field of practice knowledge,

- Generates and tests the validity of their claims to be contributing to improving the quality of the educational experiences, opportunities and relationships they and their employer are providing for learners.
- Seeks to make a contribution to the growth of global educational knowledge by making public valid accounts of the knowledge they generate through their values-laden educational-practitioner research.

A teacher employed by an Education institution has many responsibilities. For example, they have a responsibility to fulfil their contractual obligations. Their employability rests on the performance of their pupils/students as they progress through the given curriculum. Teachers also have to develop skills and knowledge to not only to secure but also to enhance their employment prospects. In many countries teachers are also required to qualify for, and maintain their membership of, a professional body.

As a professional they also have a responsibility for researching into their practice to understand, improve and explain their practice, test the validity of the knowledge they create and contribute to the knowledgebase of their field of practice and associated academic, intellectual and scholarly discourses. As education is a values-laden practical activity a professional educator recognises and accepts their educational responsibility to research into the educational experiences, opportunities and relationships they create for their pupils/students to improve them and generate valid explanations of their educational influence in the learning of their pupils/students. They also have a responsibility to keep in mind that what they do has implications beyond the educational influence they may have in the learning of an individual pupil/student or in the learning of their community of practice or organisation within which their practice is situated. There are implications which ripple beyond the here and now and contribute or confound the realisation of a universal hope of bringing into being a world within which Humanity can flourish.

The challenge a teacher faces is added to when their various responsibilities do not sit harmoniously together and they have to find a way to resolve the conflicting demands made of them and they make of themselves.

2. Consider some of the challenges teachers, as professional educators, have to face in an evolving global context.

The Department of Education of England (DoE) stipulate, “Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern... have strong subject knowledge, keep

their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.” (DoE, 2021, Teachers Standards Preamble, p.10). The standards by which ‘education’ is judged and the influence that has on the development of teachers as professionals are not dissimilar from those Zhang and Liu (2021) working in China refer to, “... managerial professionalism strongly influence teachers: examination-oriented professionalism and quality-oriented professionalism.”

What in effect they do is to foreground the purpose of education as training and knowledge transfer to prepare people for the job market. This defines the roles and responsibilities of Education institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities and the nature of the ‘education’ to be ‘delivered’. The challenges teachers, as professional educators, have to face, whatever country they work in, are those concerned with realising their professional responsibility as an educator to contribute to improving the quality of education for their pupils/students and for all. The key is to shift from teachers focussing on improving performance to enhancing educational influence in learning, which brings me to Living Educational Theory Research.

3. Illustrate how engaging in Living Educational Theory research as continuing professional development can enable teachers to free themselves of the imposition of theories, knowledge and dominant ideology to improve educational practices and the educational quality of education for all ages in the year 2030.

As a professional educator engages in Living Educational Theory Research they produce accounts of their research into their educational practice to improve and explain it and generate valid, values-laden explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and the learning of the social formations within which they live and work. Whitehead (1989) coined the term ‘living-educational-theories’ for these explanations. In the course of their research the educator clarifies the social values by which they judge and explain their practice, identifies where they experience their values contradicted and seeks to resolve these challenges to contribute to the flourishing of Humanity in the present and future.

Teachers face similar challenges presented by their employing Education institution and governments, irrespective of the time and place within which they work. The following illustrate how some, as they engage in Living Educational Theory Research as continuing professional development, have addressed those challenges.

Bognar and Zovko (2008) working in Croatia created an opportunity in class for 10-year-old pupils to research to improve something important in their lives and support each other's research. The children presented their research to the class to share and test the validity of their knowledge claims.

Mounter (2014) working in a rural English school as a head-teacher faced the challenge of having an educational influence in the learning of her staff and her school while meeting the forever increasing requirements of the English Government.

Parekh (2020) as a head-teacher in a primary school in India transformed the education in her school and sought to have an educational influence in the learning of the social formation within which her school was situated.

Gumede (2020) tackled the problems he faced as a head-teacher managing a rural South African school with few resources.

Qutoshi (2016) researched to develop transformative teacher education and address the challenge of the culturally disempowering nature of teacher education and research practices in the context of Pakistan.

4. Concluding with summarising the essential and unique contribution teachers, by developing their professionalism, can make to the flourishing of their community.

Improving educational practices at all levels of education necessitates employing well-qualified professional educators who can contribute to the growth of an educated citizenship of 2030 and beyond. Engaging in Living Educational Theory Research as continuing professional development prepares educators for the future by enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities as professional educators whatever their context.

References

Bognar, B. & Zovko, M. (2008). Pupils as action researchers: improving something important in our lives. *Educational Journal of Living Theories* 1(1) 1-49

<https://ejolts.net/node/82>

CWDC, (2007). Induction Training Programme: for Level 3 / 4 children's workforce practitioners – Learning Mentor Role Specific Modules: Handbook.

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/learningmentors/downloads/ModAHB.pdf>

DoE, (2021). Teachers' Standards: Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies, 2011, updated 2021.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>

- Ginott, H. (1972).** *Teacher and Child*. New York: Colliers Books Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Gumede, J. (2020).** Living Educational Theory Development of a Black African (Zulu) Male Educator. *Educational Journal of Living Theories* 13(1), 1-21.
<https://ejolts.net/node/354>
- Mounter, J. (2014).** Improving practice as a head-teacher through living theory research and communicating meanings of embodied values. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 7(1), 14-38. <https://ejolts.net/node/224>
- Qutoshi, S. B. (2016).** *Creating living-educational-theory: A journey towards transformative teacher education in Pakistan* (Doctoral thesis). Kathmandu University, Nepal. <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>
- Reiss, M. J. & White, J. (2013).** *An Aims-based Curriculum: The Significance of Human Flourishing for Schools*. London: Institute of Education Press.
- 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.
- Zhang, Y. & Liu, S. (2021).** Re-professionalisation or deprofessionalisation: how do Chinese high school teachers respond to the new professionalism? *Professional Development in Education*, DOI:10.1080/19415257.2021.1959382