

**Generating an epistemology for educational research from the responsibility of educators and educational researchers to research their own professional development:**

**A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Professional Development in Education**

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**Introduction**

We find ourselves within a world of growing tension and discord and in a values-laden profession such as education, values-led leadership and professional development should be considered a priority. Offering clarity and embodiment in practice of values, those of peace, human rights and the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, \*\*\*\*). Planned for, from Initial Teacher Training, through a practitioner's continuing professional development, researching any living contradictions between practice and their values, practitioners ask questions such as, "How can I improve my practice and help others to do so too?" (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2024).

Much of the continual professional development currently offered within education in England is competency-based, this includes leadership training through the National Professional Qualifications (DfE, \*\*\*\*). After years of continual professional development that was not always effective and not usually inspiring, of which I had no say in regarding the content or timing, I found myself considering my future within the profession. The issue of retention of teachers and leaders within education, was and is, a recurring tension in research and the press locally, nationally and internationally. Professor Dame Alison Peacock, in the introduction to the newly published working paper by the Chartered College of Teaching (2024), states:

"I therefore think that it is crucial for us to redefine what we mean by teacher professionalism and advocate for a more aspirational vision for our profession".

This research presents an epistemology for educational research that is grounded in a professional educational practitioner 'accepting educational responsibility' for their own continuing professional learning and development within a new Teacher Standard of professionalism, part of my PhD research, called 'Living Professionalism'. Practitioners research their practice utilising the creative research methodology of Living Educational Theory Research, clarifying the values that bring purpose and meaning to their practice within education.

Redefining our professionalism and holding educational responsibility for our own personal career path and development is important and integral to a new Standard of teacher professionalism with Living Educational Theory Research at its heart. Living Professionalism has been developed as an original contribution and new standard of judgement of teacher professionalism and values-led leadership. Educational practitioners accepting educational responsibility for their own continuing, values-led, professional development research their practice to improve it. Generating values-laden explanations of their educational influence in learning, as they contribute to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase.

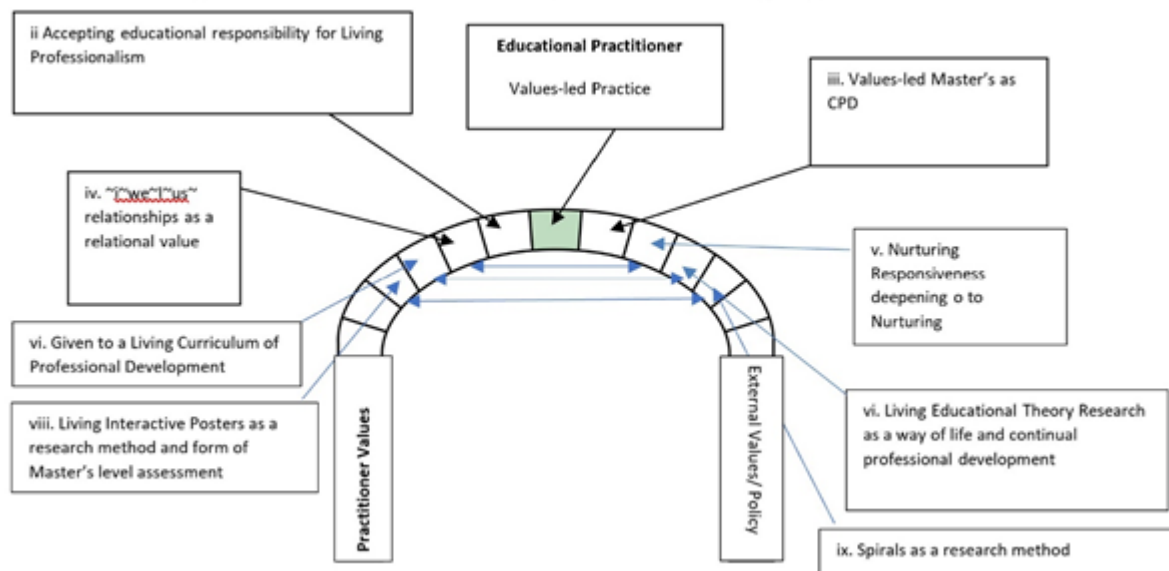
A new Teacher Standard; Living Professionalism includes a professional educational practitioner:

1. Accepting educational responsibility for personalised career development
2. Values-led educational practice clarified through research as continuing professional development, using a Living Educational Theory Research methodology
3. Membership of an international research, Peer Validation Group of intellectual and scholarly discourse
4. Given-curriculum of professional development comprising skills and knowledge defined by professional standards and Government targets
5. Educational practitioners and students/ pupils co-creating values-led explanations of educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and in the social formations they are part of
6. Clarifying values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity and a global social movement
7. Creating a reflective record of their research and developing living curriculum
8. Requirement to contribute to the educational knowledge base – publish living-educational-theory-research papers, attend and present at conferences
9. Knowledge equality and knowledge democracy
10. Study for a Living Educational Theory Research Master's Degree

In the process of my research, I have clarified my living values, drawing on these as my explanatory principles and standards, by which I judge improvement in my practice, and evaluate the validity of my contributions to knowledge, which has included the development of Living Professionalism. An illustrative representation of the relational dynamic between the ten aspects within Living Professionalism is offered as my Keystone Diagram. This diagram of Living Professionalism holds the practitioner and values-led practice at the centre. Living Professionalism and my Keystone Diagram, have been clarified over years of my research into my practice, first as a class teacher, then as Headteacher, university lecturer and finally as MA Course Leader. In an arch, the keystone is the most important block placed last and in the centre of the arch. The blocks are wedged shaped and sit edge to edge, downward pressure, force, is carried along the arch from the keystone to the pillars at each side, forcing each stone together. The arch is self-supporting, each stone vital to the integrity of the arch as a whole. The arch in my diagram demonstrates the importance of each original contribution, both individually, and to each other, supporting the relational dynamic between them to the whole,

representing Living Professionalism. I have at times, struggled to make overall sense of my data and analysis, seeing the connection of the parts together as a whole, to create a meaningful relationship and ultimately underpin my thesis. The arch diagram and keystone are a visual representation of the meaning I have derived from my thesis research. An educational practitioner accepting educational responsibility for Living Professionalism, holds the other five blocks in the arch of Living Professionalism. As you move from the keystone outwards, values-led practice and the educational practitioner are the central (green) keystone maintaining the arch. Accepting educational responsibility for Living Professionalism and values-led Master's study as continuing professional development are on either side of this keystone. Following down each side of the arch are my additional original contributions to knowledge as blocks, each one a key part of the arch's integrity, supporting the blocks on either side but also those on the opposite side. The relational dynamic between values-led practice, Master's study, accepting educational responsibility for Living Professionalism, ~i~we~l~us~ relationships, nurturing responsiveness, a given to a living curriculum and Spirals and living interactive posters as research methods, are vitally important and represented in figure 1 as the 'Keystone Diagram':

An illustrative representation of the relational dynamic between my original contributions:



Within Living Professionalism, planned continuing professional development falls within two spheres which complement each other. Knowledge, skills and competency professional development within the countries Teacher Standard, in a provided 'given curriculum' and values-led practice of professional development researched within a 'living curriculum'. Both a 'given curriculum' and 'living curriculum' of professional development complement each other, forming the two sides of a coin. The given curriculum of professional development is defined and provided within the educational setting and Teacher Standard or framework, The living curriculum created by the teacher as they accept educational responsibility to create personalised career development of values-led practice within Living Professionalism.

At the heart of researching practice to define and clarify those values that are important professionally, is a rich and creative methodology which enables a practitioner to not only

clarify their values, but to use them as their explanatory principles and standards of judgement in define improvement in the practice, as they explore the educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and across social formations. No other methodology can achieve this, whilst focusing on values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity, through a global social movement (Whitehead, \*\*\*\*) and to a professional knowledge-base. Part of Living Educational Theory Research is to be part of a supportive Peer Validation Group. This can be created within an educational setting by practitioners, to support the quality of research, the validity and rigour. It provides an opportunity for the practitioner to share within the Peer Validation Group their research, defending it through the challenge of questioning by the group. Deepening the researcher's presentation of their research, their understanding of data collection, evaluation and conclusions, new perspectives and considerations. It is also important for Peer Validation Groups to network. To connect with other Peer Validation Groups nationally and inter-nationally, offering new perspectives and challenge of educational research. This also helps share educational challenges, expectations within different countries. Inter-national Living Educational Theory Research conferences are also a good way to network and share values-led research. This contributes to a global network of values-led practice and to a growing professional knowledge-base.

It is possible and exciting for teachers to research alongside their pupils using a Living Educational Theory Research methodology, adapted for their use. This provides a rich understanding of practice from both the teachers and pupils/ students perspectives and the embodiment of values in the setting. This provides a much richer perspective than pupils solely drawn upon as a data set. I had a mixed class of 6-, 7- and 8-year-old children. I told them one morning about my studies at university in the evenings and how we are all learning. when I was asked a question by one of the children, that had a significant impact on my perspective, values and in fact, the rest of my career in education. He asked quite simply, "How can you write about learning, without us?" This was the first step towards students/ pupils co-creating values-led explanations of educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and in the social formations they are part of within Living Professionalism.

To support practitioners in values-led research of their practice, whilst gaining a master's degree qualification, two new Living Educational Theory Research Maser's have been validated:

MA: Values-led Leadership

MA: Values-led Leadership: Inclusion and Special Educational Needs

Both master's have been designed specifically to enable a values-led focus on an aspect, or aspects of a practitioner's practice they are interested in focusing on. These masters could be validated and delivered in any university in any country with a focus on developing values-led practice. However, further university study is not always possible, and to support Living Professionalism and values-led practice utilising a Living Educational Theory Research methodology, resources have been/ are being developed and will be freely available online to support values-led practice and continuing professional development within Living Professionalism.

Two research methods have been developed to support Living Educational Theory Research, by adult researchers and young people researchers, Spirals and Living Interactive posters. Spirals is a living archive, designed to support the researcher create their own living-educational-theory by capturing and enabling the re-visiting of data, reflections, notes, audio, visual data across a career or school life. Incorporating given and living curriculum continuing professional development, Spirals can be personalised to meet the users' needs and personal aesthetic. A version of Spirals has also been adapted, refined to support Adlerian Therapists (health) and their students developing and researching values-led practice. Alongside this on-going method, Living Interactive Posters has also been developed. Providing a snap shot in time of a practitioner's research, a Living Interactive Poster has been validated as an assessment at level 7, within the two new Living Educational Theory Research Masters degrees. Created using images, recordings, text, linked to the poster through URL's, the poster is clarified and created with feedback and discussion about the research in a Peer Validation Group, both aspects making the poster interactive. These posters, as well as a master's assessment, are key to sharing research at conferences, across settings, published online or within an academic journal such as EJOLTs, Educational Journal of Living Theories.

Mounter (2024) has examined the literature on Living Educational Theory Research and revealed a limitation in understanding of the explanatory principles that can explain educational influences in the learning of social formations. Most Living Educational Theory Researchers engage and focus on the educational influences in their own learning and the learning of others, usually pupils, students or colleagues. Often the third aspect which Whitehead ( ) discusses, the educational influences in learning in social formations, is often forgotten. This, I believe, limits the understanding and use of Living Educational Theory Research methodology by practitioner researchers.

To help to address this limitation, Mounter (2024) has developed a new explanatory principle of educational influences in learning,  $\sim i \sim \sim we \sim I \sim us \sim$  as a relational value. The  $\sim$  (tilde) represents relational, nurturing responsiveness deepening over time to nurturing connectiveness (Mounter, 2024) of educational influences in learning. Flowing both ways, this can energise those engaged, whilst challenging thinking, posing and answering questions, suggesting, clarifying, confusing, all which can be explored in a practitioner's living archive - Spirals. The lower case relational  $\sim i \sim$  (Whitehead and Huxtable, 2016) is offered through nurturing connectiveness, shared thoughts and learning in  $\sim we \sim$ , demonstrating educational influences in learning in my own learning, the influences from  $\sim we \sim$ , others, on myself and in return on them. The  $\sim I \sim$  is the reflection of understanding and learning through nurturing responsiveness or nurturing connectiveness found through reflection in Spirals and the clarity it brings to my professional values and myself, which I embody in my practice. My professional self, my personal self, my learner self, my researcher self. The importance of  $\sim us \sim$  is in addressing the limitation I identified in current Living Educational Theory Research, the missing focus on the third element of educational influences in learning across social formations.

