

# **Supporting professional educational-practitioners to develop research-informed practice and contribute to an educational knowledge base.**

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## **Abstract**

Over the years I have been developing my understanding of: Living Theory research (Whitehead, 1989) as an approach to researching personal, political and professional practice (Huxtable, 2016) grounded in an aspiration to give expression in practice to people's embodied intrinsic values (Crompton, 2010) and contribute to the flourishing of humanity; what distinguishes a professional educational-practitioner (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016) and; various ways to support educational-researchers in different contexts and locations (Huxtable, 2017). Through this paper I intend to extend my understandings by exploring the implications of the Japanese concept of Ikigai (a reason for being), the African concept of Ubuntu (I am because we are) and the Cooperative Movement (with its origins in Britain), for improving support for professional educational-practitioners to develop research-informed practice and contribute to an educational knowledge base.

## **Introduction**

When I started working as an educational psychologist, during 1977 in an English local authority, most of my activities were directed at supporting teachers to develop research-informed practice to improve the educational learning of children they were concerned about. Since leaving employment in a local authority in 2012 I have focussed on supporting professional educational-practitioners working in various fields and cultures, to develop their research-informed educational practice and contribute to an educational knowledge base through Living Theory research.

Living Theory (Whitehead, 1989) is a form of self-study practitioner-research, whereby the life-enhancing values that give a person's life and work meaning and purpose, are clarified and enable them to understand, improve, explain and evaluate their practice. Education being a values-based activity makes Living Theory research particularly relevant for teachers, working in school and HE, to realise their professional responsibilities as educational-practitioners.

In this paper I:

1. Clarify the some of the purposes of education that inform the development of teachers practice as professional educational-practitioners,

2. Give a brief summary of why awareness of Ikigai, Ubuntu and The Cooperative Movement is helping me to extend my understanding of what constitutes professional educational practice,
3. Briefly summarise Living Theory research as support for professional educational practitioners to develop their research-informed practice and contribute to an educational knowledge base.
4. Give examples of other forms of support for professional educational-practitioners researching their practice and contributing to an educational knowledge base,
5. Reflect with some concluding thoughts

### **1. Clarifying the some of the purposes of education that inform the development of teachers practice as professional educational-practitioners**

English is an eclectic language with diverse, often forgotten roots, and has the largest lexicon of any language. Words from other cultures have for eons been embraced and integrated into English. In the process, new thoughts have been created, which influence the speaker's own culture and ways of being and doing things in unforeseen, and often unnoticed, ways. It is one of the many benefits the British have derived as a mongrel people formed by their colonisers and those they have colonised. Unfortunately the contribution that such diversity has made to the evolution of the English language, thought and ways of being and doing is often not recognised and many creative possibilities are lost. This very, very brief exploration of historical meanings of 'educate', 'educator', and 'teach' and the influence on the purpose and practice of 'education' helps me clarify the nature and value of the support for professional educational-practitioners I have been party to developing.

What follows draws on just three sources (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>, <http://www.dictionary.com/> and <https://www.etymonline.com/>) but I hope it suffices to illustrate how words evolve meanings and practices and the confusion of understandings that can subsequently result.

Educate is currently defined on <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/educate> as:

**a** : to provide schooling for

**b** : to train by formal instruction and supervised practice especially in a skill, trade, or profession

**2a** : to develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically especially by instruction

**b** : to provide with information :

**3**: to persuade or condition to feel, believe, or act in a desired way

The word 'educate', which was first recorded in mid/late 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy, has two different Latin roots according to <http://www.dictionary.com/>:

#### Educate (v)

According to "Century Dictionary," *educere*, of a child, is "usually with reference to bodily nurture or support, while *educare* refers more frequently to the mind," and, "There is no authority for the common statement that the primary sense of *education* is to 'draw out or unfold the powers of the mind.'"

It is easy to see how these contrasting meanings has led to contrasting understanding of what it is to be an educator as summarised on <https://www.etymonline.com>:

#### Educator (n)

1560s, "one who nourishes or rears;" 1670s, "one who trains or instructs," from Latin *educator* (in classical Latin, "a foster father," then also "a tutor"), agent noun from past participle stem of *educare* (see [educate](#)). Latin *educatrix* meant "a nurse."

It is interesting to note the shift in meaning over a hundred years, while both meanings are retained in current usage. The emphasis of the role may vary and when not clarified can result in at best confusion and at worst conflict.

The origin of 'teach' is much earlier and was first recorded during 900 in Britain coming from middle/old English with its Germanic roots:

#### Teach:

Old English *tæcan* (past tense *tæhte*, past participle *tæht*) "to show, point out, declare, demonstrate," also "to give instruction, train, assign, direct; warn; persuade..."

The original sense of Old English *tæcan* was "show, declare, warn, persuade" ... while the Old English word for "to teach, instruct, guide" was more commonly *læran*, source of modern [learn](#) and [lore](#).

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/educate/>

(Interesting how teach and learn are or were related.)

Warnock, in the report of the 'Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People', clearly spells out two meanings of education reflecting the different etymological and cultural roots:

1.4 We hold that education has certain long-term goals, that it has a general point or purpose, which can be definitely, though generally, stated. The goals are twofold, different from each other, but by no means incompatible. They are, first, to enlarge a child's knowledge, experience

and imaginative understanding, and thus his awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment; and secondly, to enable him to enter the world after formal education is over as an active participant in society and a responsible contributor to it, capable of achieving as much independence as possible. The educational needs of every child are determined in relation to these goals. (page 5)

The same could be said to hold true of education in HE; all that is needed is to substitute 'learner' for 'child'. Warnock could also have added; educational practice is determined in relation to these goals too. What Warnock doesn't draw on is the wealth of work generated on the values-base educational purposes of education to enhance a person's ability to learn to contribute to the flourishing of humanity, their own and that of others.

In modern usage in England teacher and educator are often used synonymously and with much richer meanings than dictionary definitions, as exemplified by the work of philosophers such as Reiss and White (2013) who wrote:

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.

What Reiss and White have added to the mix is that education is not just to prepare a person to be a member of society but also to presence themselves to themselves. They point to a purpose of education as educational that concerns individuals learning to develop the confidence and competence to acquire, create and contribute knowledge of themselves, the world and themselves in and of the world, which enables them to contribute to the flourishing of humanity (their own and others)

In practice the aims of education, and hence practice to realise those aims, depends on the personal, professional and political motivations of the person/s involved and the contexts in which they situate themselves and their practice. Speaking for myself, I am concerned to support those teachers, and others, who want to develop their practice as professional educational-practitioners, fulfilling their responsibility to enable their students to progress educationally through their living curriculum *and* to progress and gain accreditation for their learning of the content of the given curriculum provided by the institution. I understand the student's living curriculum to comprise the evolving knowledge of self and self in and of the world, created by a person as they learn to live a loving life that is satisfying, productive and worthwhile for themselves and others. What distinguishes an educational-practitioner as professional is that they are prepared to research their practice to understand, improve and explain it *and* make public the valid knowledge they generate as a contribution to the development of an educational knowledge base that all might draw on (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016) for the flourishing of humanity.

I understand education to have many purposes. Such complexity has implications for professional educational-practitioners seeking to support their own learning and that of others to continually research to evolve understandings, improve practice, explain it and communicate the knowledge created in the process. We see what we look for. Other cultures offer different lenses through which to look that may enrich our perspectives and practice, which brings me to my interest in Ikigai, Ubuntu and the Cooperative Movement.

## **2. Ikigai, Ubuntu and the Cooperative Movement**

Ikigai and Ubuntu are created in very different cultures. Ikigai grew in Japan's many small islands where people have created a monoculture they are reputed to work hard to maintain. Africa by contrast is a huge landmass, home to disparate peoples with diverse socio and cultural histories, which have had a discernable influence on the members of various tribes and countries present ways of being and doing things. The Cooperative Movement originated in a small island I live in, the culture of which is formed by the diverse peoples that come, go and stay and a few of whom can trace their ancestry back to earlier migrants and invaders from across the Roman empire, the Normans, Vikings, Saxons... and even fewer who might, at a stretch, be able to connect them to immigrants who predated them.

The purpose of education as determined by politicians and the general public in Britain is in terms of improving the chances of people to be employed in jobs with high financial reward and high prestige, even though the number of kinds that can be of use in society is very, very limited and there is commonly a bloodbath as a selection procedure (Parkinson Law rules!).

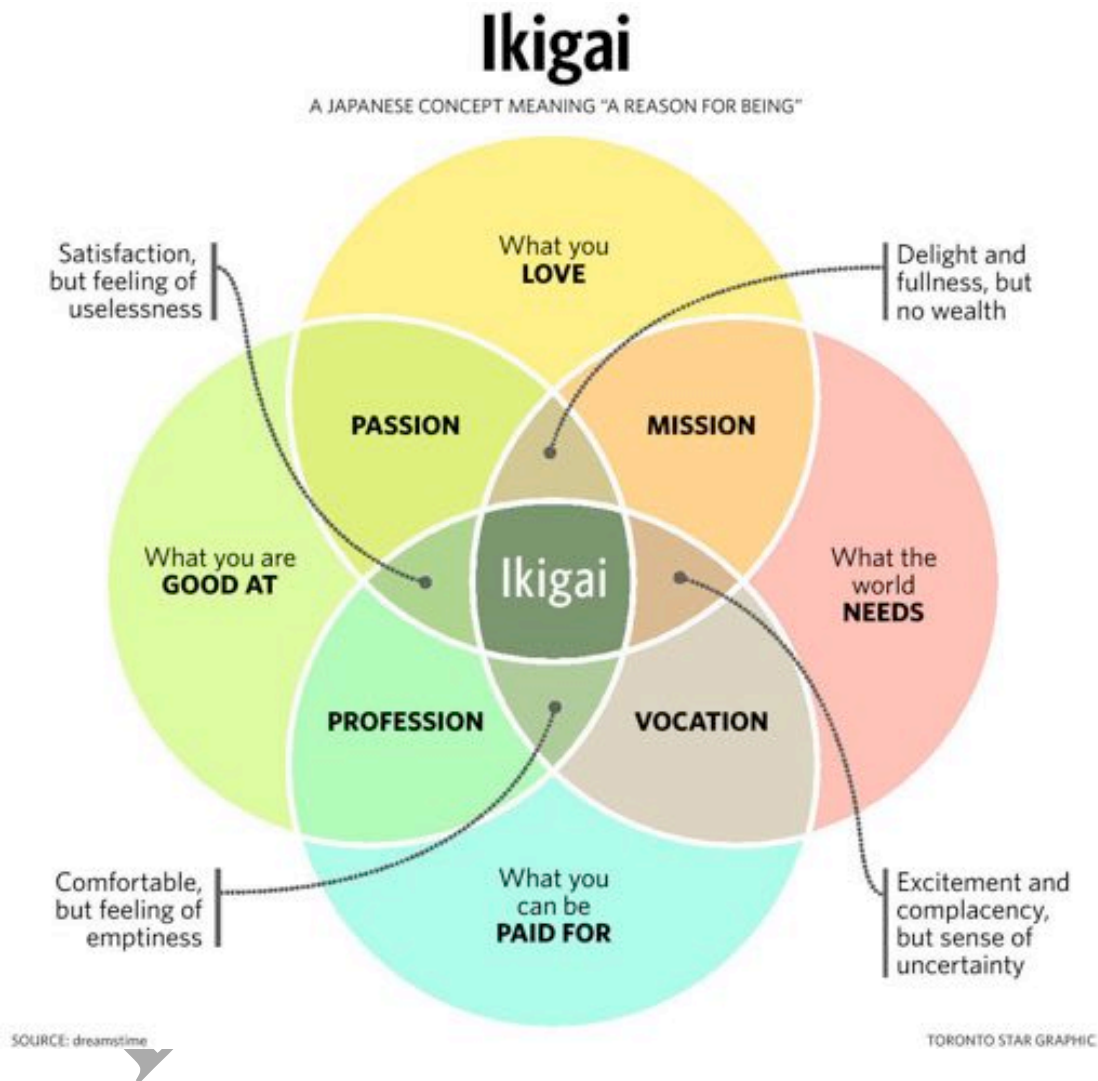
I am British, born and bred influenced by the multinational/ethnic sociocultural history of a family that has migrated through the centuries. Hence, I do not purport to tell you what Ikigai means to someone imbued with Japanese cultural understandings or what Ubuntu means to someone seeped in one or more African traditions. I am trying to understand the meanings of the indigenous lived expressions of those concepts while recognising I am limited as to what sense I can make of them given my own lens. However, I am not so much concerned with 'understanding' in a disembodied lexical manner but rather with understanding the educational influence the search for meaning and embodied communication of these concepts have on my practice as a professional educational-practitioner.

I say this as a preamble to the contribution I believe trying to understand and work with concepts named in cultures other than my own may make. My intention is not to try to appropriate, to take possession of, concepts from other cultures but rather to integrate insights I can derive by trying to learn from what I can understand of their perspectives and invite you to do the same.

*2a Ikigai*

I am not Japanese so do not understand Ikigai as a lived concept. But when I saw a representation of what it brought together I felt it expressed something of what I have been struggling to understand, act on and communicate.

When I saw an article on Ikigai I saw a representation of the purpose of education that provided a clearer picture of how some of the various purposes of education might be held together. This image illustrates it well. I like it particularly because it points to what is 'missing' when all the 'pieces' are not held in harmony.



**Image 1. A representation of Ikigai downloaded from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/08/is-this-japanese-concept-the-secret-to-a-long-life>**

Ikigai is translated as the pleasures and meanings of life:

The term *ikigai* is composed of two Japanese words: *iki* referring to life, and *kai*, which roughly means "the realisation of what one expects and

hopes for". Unpacking the word and its associated symbol a bit further, *ikigai* is seen as the convergence of four primary elements:

- What you Love (your passion) - What do you Love? What aspects of your life bring you into your heart and make you come alive?
- What the World Needs (your mission) - What Cause do you believe in? What breaks your heart or pulls at your gut? What change would you most love to create in the world? What would you give your life for?
- What you are Good at (your vocation) - What are you Great at? What unique skills do you have that come most naturally to you? What talents have you cultivated and what do you excel at even when you aren't trying?
- What you can get Paid for (your profession) - What do people Value and pay you for? What service, value or offering do you bring, or could you bring, that brings real value to others? Something people need and are happy to pay for or share some value in exchange?

The word *ikigai*, that space in the middle of these four elements, is seen as the source of value or what make one's life truly worthwhile. In Okinawa, Japan, *ikigai* is thought of as "a reason to get up in the morning". Interestingly, while certainly incorporating the financial aspects of life, the word is more often used to refer to the mental and spiritual state behind our circumstance as opposed to our current economic status alone. Even if we are moving through a dark or challenging time, if we are moving with purpose, if we are feeling called toward something or have a clear goal in mind, we may still experience *ikigai*. Often the behaviors that make us feel *ikigai* are not the ones we are forced to take based on the expectations of the world around us, but rather they are the natural actions and spontaneous responses that emerge from a deep and direct connection to life

From <http://upliftconnect.com/ikigai-finding-your-reason-for-being/>

It is not as simple as 'how to make money':

One's *ikigai* may have nothing to do with income. In fact, in a [survey](#) of 2,000 Japanese men and women conducted by Central Research Services in 2010, just 31% of recipients considered work as their *ikigai*. Someone's value in life can be work – but is certainly not limited to that...

*Japanese people believe that the sum of small joys in everyday life results in more fulfilling life as a whole*

Hasegawa points out that in English, the word *life* means both lifetime and everyday life. So, *ikigai* translated as *life's purpose* sounds very grand. "But in Japan we have *jinsei*, which means lifetime and *seikatsu*, which means everyday life," he says. The concept of *ikigai* aligns more to *seikatsu* and, through his research, Hasegawa discovered that Japanese

people believe that the sum of small joys in everyday life results in more fulfilling life as a whole.

From <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170807-ikigai-a-japanese-concept-to-improve-work-and-life>

I can't read Japanese and most writings I have been able to access have been by American's and British. Their representation, with the inevitable Venn diagram and the cultural focus on economic, has been useful to me to see earning a living in a relationship with other aspects of psychological wellbeing and education of an individual. However, I think they perhaps give a distorted meaning of ikigai. That said, for now I want to work with the dimension that takes me into realising the purposes of professional educational-practitioners concerned with their student's ability to learn to enhance their educational influence in their own learning and life, that of others and the social formation within which they live and work *and* to gain the skills and knowledge to earn a living.

For me there seems to be a resonance between ikigai and what Frankl said:

Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfilment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it.

[https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/viktor\\_e\\_frankl\\_126225](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/viktor_e_frankl_126225)

It is very rare (if at all) that a person only does what they love to do all the time. I therefore believe that part of my educational practice is to also enable them to learn to find what they love doing within what they *are* doing – in other words to recognise, value and work with the possibilities that exist within what they do that contributes to them realising in practice their evolving ikigai. As Frankl said:

'... the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.' 'It is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions.'

To understand your ikigai requires self-study – a study of your self within and your relational self – which takes me to the African concept of Ubuntu (I am because we are).

## *2b Ubuntu*

I do not claim to understand Ubuntu as someone born and raised in an African country (I say that rather than Africa as Africa is a continent inhabited by a huge number of peoples each with their own unique language, history and culture. I believe that Ubuntu may have similar but different meanings in different African languages and cultures).

Nelson Mandela communicates meanings of Ubuntu in this brief (1.37) video clip. 'Respect, helpfulness, sharing, community, caring, trust, unselfishness', come up on the screen followed by, 'One word can mean so much.' At 0.19 Tim Modise introduces the interview with, 'Many people consider you as a personification of



Ubuntu. What do you understand Ubuntu to be?' It is not just reading the few words that Mandela speaks that I understand Ubuntu but it is through the intonation of his voice, his body and his way of being that communicates Ubuntu personified in these few seconds of video.



## Video 2 Nelson Mandela on Ubuntu

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODO4WiDsEBQ>

I do not want to replace one set of impositional power structures with another, not even my own. However, I do want people to take responsibility for their relational self, the influence their presence in the world has and make a contribution to the flourishing of humanity, their own and other peoples. I don't know whether 'I am because we are' communicates fully the meaning of Ubuntu or whether that includes a sense of, 'we are because I am'. If it doesn't then I want to add it in recognition that each person makes a unique contribution to what 'we' are as much as 'we' influence each person's life. I believe that the way of coming to a decision in many African cultures, illustrates the value of the individual 'i' recognised in a collective 'we'.

Nothing stays the same, no more than the same place can ever be visited twice, but somehow the prevailing power reproduces and persists, and the oppressed can transform into the oppressor. Charles (2007) shows how it is possible for individuals to break free of such a cycle to emancipate and liberate themselves. In researching his question, '... how I can improve my practice as someone seeking to make a transformational contribution to the position of people of African origin', as management consultant, educator and father, he explains how he works free of replicating and inflicting on others, what he has suffered as a result of the racial prejudice he experienced. Through his living-theory research he brings Ubuntu, guiltless recognition and societal re-identification as living

standards of judgment into the Academy and so contributes to the educational knowledge base.

Last, but not least, I want to point to what the Cooperative Movement offers me in developing my understanding and practice as a professional educational-practitioner.

### *2.c The Cooperative Movement*

The Cooperative movement originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a small group of textile workers, who having been fired and blacklisted by employers following an unsuccessful strike, formed the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. They pooled their money to open and run a small dry goods store as a cooperative venture based on the belief that industries and commercial concerns should be owned and controlled by the people working in them, for joint economic benefit. The International Cooperative Alliance revised the principles in 1995 and produced the 'Statement on Cooperative Identity', as the basis of cooperatives worldwide driven by values and not just profit:

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

From <https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>

I find it interesting to note that the co-operative is about how business is constituted and conducted and how in doing so a person can generate an income ethically in this complex, global village, as distinct from being employed by someone else (employees are not necessarily members of the cooperative) or being self-employed:

Co-operatives are businesses owned and run by and for their members. Whether the members are the customers, employees or residents they have an equal say in what the business does and a share in the profits.

As businesses driven by values not just profit, co-operatives share internationally agreed principles and act together to build a better world through co-operation.

From <https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>

Ikigai brought the economic, earning a living ethically, into connection with learning about yourself in terms of doing what you love, the talents you devote time and effort developing, and what you believe in that feels worth your while. Ubuntu brings into focus a purpose of education with respect to the relational nature of 'self' ('i') and others as part of 'we'. The Cooperative Movement brings the practicalities of making a living into focus as one of the purposes of

education, which is to enhance the ability of a person learning to live humanitarian values in the world while making a living.

Professional educational-practitioners need a form of research that enables them to research their educational practice to understand, improve and explain it in terms of educational values that are at the heart of the enterprise of education. Living Theory research offers such a form of research.

### 3. Living Theory research

Living Theory research (originated by Whitehead) is a form of self-study practitioner-research. The 'self' studied is not an isolated, self-serving self. An individual can only live in relationship with other human beings and the world we all inhabit. Each person is brought into being through a relationship between people. Who and what they are, want to be and become, is shaped by what they make of their direct and indirect relationships with other people past, present and future. Each person also has an influence on others by their very existence and the expression of their embodied values. The majority of people, irrespective of cultural setting, ascribe to themselves intrinsic values and want to be a benign presence if not also make a discernable contribution to the flourishing of humanity (Crompton, 2010). The 'self' researched by the researcher through Living Theory research explicitly recognises 'I am because we are' *and* 'we are because I am', to recognise, value and work to enhance the educational influence of 'self' as expressed in the quote of Hillel:

'If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?' (Ethics of the Fathers, Pirkei Avot, 1:14)

Professional educational-practitioners engage in Living Theory research as self-study as they recognise that integral to researching their educational influence in the learning of others, to enhance the life and learning of others, is researching the expressions in practice of their embodied ontological and relational values to understand and enhance their educational influence in their own learning,

The practitioner-research of Living Theory research is that of a professional educational-practitioner. Living Theory research arose in the field of practice of teachers in school and university. Subsequently it has been found to be of relevance for anyone, what ever their place of employment and designated role, or other place of practice (such as family), who has the intention of understanding and enhancing their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the social formations they live and work in, and contributing to an educational knowledge base. Whitehead coined the term 'living-educational-theory', for these valid explanations of educational influences in learning (Whitehead, 1989). A Living Theory researcher clarifies their embodied life-affirming and life-enhancing values, that give meaning and purpose to their lives, and show how they serve as their explanatory principles of their practice and the standards by which they hold themselves to account. In the process they identify where they experience themselves as a living contradiction or experience their values denied and seek to resolve the tensions

by improving their practice in the direction of living their humanitarian values as fully as they can, while accepting that 'perfection' can not exist (thankfully).

As the participants in this conference are primarily working in school and HE and many want to develop their practice as professional educational-practitioners, which is as I have said, is a values-based activity, they may find the many examples of Living Theory research freely accessible from <http://www.actionresearch.net/> and <http://ejolts.net/> a useful resource. There they will also find examples of professional educational-practitioners engaging in Living Theory research in other fields, for instance that of Pound (2003), working as a Health Visitor in England, and Tattersall (2011) as an environmental activist in Tasmania.

Living Theory research is the process through which an educational-practitioner can research their practice to understand and improve it and create and contribute, to an educational knowledge base, a valid values-based explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations (Whitehead, 1989). There are two claims implicit in that statement that Living Theory researchers attempt to offer clarification and evidence for:

1. The researcher claims to know their practices and be improving them
2. The researcher claims to know their own educational learning and be improving it

Let me take this one at a time, starting with the claim by the educational-practitioner to know their practices. I say 'practices' as I believe that teachers in school and lecturers/tutors/supervisors etc in HE have many roles to realise their responsibilities to their employer and themselves. For instance they have practices as pedagogue and instructor to fulfil their responsibility to their employer by enabling students to gain high marks in designated tests. They also have a practice as professional educational-practitioner to fulfil their responsibility to themselves, their students, their employers and the community within which they live and work to enhance their *educational* influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations for the flourishing of humanity (their own and that of others).

Living Theory research holds these two together through focussing on a seemingly ambiguous question, such as, 'how can I improve what I am doing?' *and* an apparently clearer question related to them living their embodied values, for example, 'how can I live my values as fully as I can as I do what I do?' These two questions are distinct (not discrete) but often become conflated as the Living Theory research progresses. The key to understanding how this comes about is by recognising that for us to live lives that feel fulfilling we have to feel authentic in all areas of our lives. There is a sense of dis-ease when we experience ourselves as living-contradictions and/or where our values are denied in practice. Living Theory researchers live and research in the real, not an idealised, world and we are humans and as such are fallible and variously mixed up. As a consequence Living Theory researchers accept that we do not, and often cannot,

always live our values as fully as we aspire to but we can strive to do the best we can. As Frankl said,

'Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'.'

And:

'Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.'

We do not live in an idealised world. We live in a world fraught with challenges and competing responsibilities however, as Frankl said:

'The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance.'

and

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Read more at:

[https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/viktor\\_e\\_frankl\\_160380](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/viktor_e_frankl_160380)

Examples of teachers in diverse cultures and contexts developing their research-based educational practice and contributing to an educational knowledge base through Living Theory research include:

- In Israel, Anat Geller's Ed.D. Thesis (2010) Within Dialogue and Without: How has 'Being in the Unkown' become a value in my developing as a better dialogical educator? Awarded by University of Bath.
- In India, Swaroop Rawal's Ph.D. Thesis (2006) The role of drama in enhancing life skills in children with specific learning difficulties in a Mumbai school: My reflective account. Awarded by Coventry University in Collaboration with the University of Worcester.
- In Pakistan, Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi's Ph.D. Thesis (2016) Creating Living-Educational-Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education in Pakistan. Awarded by University of Kathmandu, Nepal.
- In South Africa, Elizabeth Wolvaardt's Ph.D. Thesis(2013) Over the conceptual horizon of public health: A living theory of teaching

undergraduate medical students, Awarded by University of Pretoria, South Africa.

These and other examples of accounts by Living Theory researchers awarded doctorates can be found on <http://www.actionresearch.net/>

I have so far sought to show the relevance of Living Theory research (Whitehead, 1989) for teachers as an approach to researching personal, political and professional practice (Huxtable, 2016) grounded in an aspiration to give expression in practice to embodied intrinsic values (Crompton, 2010) and contribute to the flourishing of humanity. I now want to move on to exemplify other forms of support I have been party to developing for educational-practitioners researching their practice and contributing to an educational knowledge base.

#### **4. Examples of other forms of support**

There may be moments of epiphany that can appear to be flashes of insight and inspiration that come from nowhere. However, for the most part, efforts by a professional educational-practitioner to engage in transformational change to enhance their educational influence in their own learning and life and that of their pupils/students takes time, effort and a creative, uncertain journey along a foggy, often indistinct and multidimensional path. Biesta (2007) talks of something similar when he writes:

‘Research can only tell us what has worked in a particular situation, not what will work in any future situation. The role of the educational professional in this process is not to translate general rules into particular lines of action. It is rather to use research findings to make one’s problem solving more intelligent. This not only involves deliberation and judgment about the means and techniques of education; it involves at the very same time deliberation and judgment about the ends of education — and this in a strict and conjugate relation with deliberation and judgment about the means.’ (pp. 20,22)

While Biesta points to the relationship between the ends and means what he doesn’t point to is the nature of support for the educational-practitioner researching their relational ‘i’ within a context where the purpose of education includes contributing to a student making progress through the given as well as their living curriculum. I have so far focussed on how engaging in Living Theory research supports such an undertaking. Now I want to bring to your attention three other examples of support for teachers, and others, as professional educational-practitioners developing research-informed practice and contributing to an educational knowledge base. I want to point to intellectual, social and emotional support that includes the ideas of the purposes of education now enriched by what I am learning of Ikigai, Ubuntu and The Cooperative Movement.

##### *4a Living-posters*

The idea of living-posters arose from a concern of Whitehead's to enable educational-practitioner researchers to join the Town Hall Meeting, of the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) conference in Toronto on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 through multi-screen SKYPE. The meeting was brought about as a result of Delong's successful proposal, which can be accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/arna/ARNA2015TownHallProposal090215.pdf>, included:

The intent of this Town Hall meeting is to engage practitioner-researchers across the globe as on site and virtual, through the internet, attendees in a living-culture-of-inquiry through values-based dialogue in creating living theories (explanations of our influence).

Multi-screen SKYPE conversations are shown to be influencing our perceptions of the idea of Ubuntu that 'I am because we are/we are because I am' or i~we for shorthand and enabling us to 'pool' our lifeaffirming and life-enhancing energies, as well as sharing and evolving our relationally dynamic culture of inquiry and Living Theory research.

It became evident that many wouldn't be able to participate for various reasons so the other question became clearer, how to enable people who could not physically, or virtually participate in real time to be 'presenced' with their work. The challenge of creating a living-poster offers learning that is different to that of a traditional abstract for a paper, dissertation or thesis. Both demands a distillation to extract the essence of a complex picture that can help the researcher to clarify what constitutes their practice and offer a window into their research at a moment in time and the influential connections to thinking, people, collectives and networks in influencing social formations.

Living-posters, as a research method, has potentially two inter-related uses for a Living Theory researcher developing their research-informed professional educational-practice and contributing to an educational knowledge base:

- 1) Enhance their educational influence in their own learning and
- 2) Enhances the contributions they make to, and the benefit they derive from, the learning of others and social formations.

These are, 'distinct but not discrete' (Rayner, personal communication). It is possible to use a living-poster in the same way as you could use entries for a journal or diary for private reflective and reflexive thinking, which may, or may not be used as data and/or evidence at a later date. By making your living-posters public you can contribute to established, and the emergence of new, 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Living Theory research communities are formed when groups of people, who share a concern or a passion for something they do and want to learn how to do it better *and* want to produce valid explanations of their educational influences, come together for convivial, productive conversations.

The brief for creating a living-poster has evolved to:

1. Create and upload a video-clip (absolute max 3 mins) to YouTube of you communicating the essentials of your: context; interests; ontological and relational values that motivate you; research passions.
2. Create an attractive A4 page using images and text, which includes brief details of your: context; interests; ontological and relational values that motivate you; research passions; details of a few of your key publications; the url to your website if you have one; your contact details and the url to your YouTube video.
3. 4 words (max) that communicate what you are about.

The posters were brought together into one as a 'homepage' for presentation at the ARNA Town Hall. Subsequently other events have provided the motivation for people to revisit and revise their living-posters and for new people to join. You can access the latest from:



Access from <http://www.actionresearch.net/>  
 contact [jack@actionresearch.net](mailto:jack@actionresearch.net) to add your living-poster

**Image 2. Homepage of living-posters access from <http://www.actionresearch.net/>**

The homepage is organised with networks at the top. Follow a link and you will see some of the images of the people who form the community or network with a couple of words to give you a clue as to what they are about to help you decide whether to dip into their individual poster, if they have one. If you do you will find links to other networks they are part of to help you further connect with more people with whom you may share a particular interest.



Below the networks you will find thumbnails of individual posters again with a few words to give you a quick idea as to whether you might find it interesting to go into the poster and learn more. Each person has given you a link to a YouTube of them talking for just a couple of minutes so you can get a feel for who they are and what they are about. Each poster is unique and offers an insight into the unique contribution that person is making at a moment in time.

#### *4b SKYPE research groups developing as communities*

Life is easier and thinking enriched by sharing your research journey with other like-minded people. It is not to be confused with participatory or collaborative research. Each member of the community formed by a Living Theory research SKYPE group is researching their own question and in the process contributes to and benefits from their own learning and the learning of others in the conversations, which may or may not be focussed on their particular research interest. Examples of these communities can be found by following the links on the living-posters homepage, for example the Skype Living Theory research support groups (image 2).

Members of the SKYPE Living Theory research support groups are based in various countries, cultures and fields of practice. As well as Living Theory research we each have a variety of commitments and interests. What we have in common is a commitment to doing what we can to contribute to the flourishing of humanity and spreading the educational influence of Living Theory research as a social movement.'

You can see members sharing insights into aspects of their Ikigai expressed in their accounts of their research. Each feels recognised by other and their sense of self is enriched as each takes an honest interest in the other as an expression of Ubuntu and each presence themselves expressing cooperative values described by the Cooperative Movement.

**Living-posters homepage**

**Members of the SKYPE Living Theory research support groups, are based in various countries, cultures and fields of practice. As well as Living Theory research we each have a variety of commitments and interests. What we have in common is a commitment to doing what we can to contribute to the flourishing of humanity and spreading the educational influence of Living Theory research as a social movement.**

**SKYPE Living Theory research support group**

There are two groups, one for post-doc researchers and the other for pre-doc researchers. We share our research and provide a safe, critical, supportive context to help each other researching educational practice to improve it and create valid accounts of living-educational-theories. The Skype meetings are weekly and last between 30 and 60 minutes.

For more information contact [jack@actionresearch.net](mailto:jack@actionresearch.net) and visit <http://www.actionresearch.net>

**Members and their fields of practice:**

- Arianna Briganti**: Sustainable development
- Robyn Pound**: Alongside-ness, health visiting provision
- Jack Whitehead**: Academic, practitioner educational research
- Marie Huxtable**: Passion-led learning
- Pip Bruce Ferguson**: Staff development
- Jackie DeLong**: Practitioner-researcher
- Sonia Hutchison**: Sustainable leadership
- Swaroop Rawal**: Teacher education, drama
- Per-Jensco Goveh**: Growth mindset, teacher training
- Sadrudin Qureshi**: Educator & educational researcher
- Surinder Sandham Bains**: Caring, health visiting, CPO
- Moira Lakšica**: Emancipating learners
- Teri Young**: Teacher education
- Liz Campbell**: Teacher, educational researcher
- Joy Mounier**: Teacher educator, educational researcher
- Judy McFride**: Arts-based methods, enquiring together
- Bruce Camons**: Community development
- Sarah Haddock**: Dance, embodied knowing
- Castriona McDonagh**: Teacher Education

**Image 2. Homepage SKYPE Living Theory research support groups living-posters accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/skypepgp020617.pdf>**

*4.c Support for a Living Theory research Masters programme*

Another form of support I have been party to developing is that of a Masters programme, initially offered at the University of Bath. The programme comprised three modules, Understanding Learners and Learning, Gifts Talents & Education, Research methods, three Educational enquiries and a dissertation.

The programme offered a unique opportunity for teachers, and other educators to develop their research-informed practice by researching their practice to improve it and contribute the knowledge they generated to an educational knowledge base. The modules specifically focussed the practitioner on understanding their values and expressing them more fully in their practice and meeting the university criteria for their work to be accredited at Masters level.

The CPD modules enabled the practitioner to develop their ability to research to improve their practice, make judgements of the educational influence they were having in their own learning, the learning of their pupils and colleagues and in the organisations/institutions/social formations they were part of and create valid values-based explanations of their practice. The modules both connected the practitioner-researcher with the thinking in the field and provided the challenge of exploring their practice through different lenses. So, while there appears to be similarities between the modules, they in effect enabled the practitioner to grow their sophistication as practitioner-researchers, focussing on learning to research to improve their practice. At the same time students contributed to educational knowledge by making public their embodied knowledge in the process of its evolution.

While it was not the easiest route to a Masters qualification it responded to the desire of those practitioners to use a Masters programme as a vehicle to improve their educational practice and contribute to educational knowledge. One student reported that she had done two traditional modules elsewhere because she wanted the Masters qualification and that was the fastest way; she returned to us to do the rest, including her dissertation, because of what she learned in the process - learning she couldn't engage in when doing the two traditionally taught modules. Another student had successfully completed traditional modules elsewhere and only re-engaged on a Masters programme because she was able to research her practice in this way.

Evidence of the generative and transformational effect of progressing through modules with us in this way can be seen by the accredited accounts of those who worked with us over years accessible from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/mastermod.shtml>. An indicator of the quality of the work is the approach one of our students had from an American Journal to publish their assignment. Many of their accounts have also appeared in Gifted Education International issues 2013 (issue 29(3)) and 2016 (issue 32(1)).

## **5. Concluding thoughts**

In the process of creating this paper I have made progress with understanding Ikigai, Ubuntu and the Cooperative Movement and the relevance for extending

my understanding of the purposes of education and the roles and responsibilities of professional educational-practitioners. I can see more clearly the relevance of Living Theory research as a support for professional educational-practitioners to develop their research-informed practice and contribute to an educational knowledge base.

Previously I have focussed in my practice on how to support individuals to find what it is that gives meaning and purpose to their lives and give expression as fully to those values as they can through Living Theory research. Through beginning to explore Ikigai, Ubuntu and the Cooperative Movement I have extended my understandings of the purpose of education to include a relational notion of economic wellbeing, whereby an individual can earn a living *and* give expression to their life-affirming and life-enhancing values *and* bring into being a society where humanity can flourish, their own and others. This is a thread I want to explore further.

Through working on this paper I have come to the same place again – I have seen the importance of frequently asking not just how can I improve what I am doing but testing whether I understand what I am doing, what my practice is, and why I do what I do and whether I understand what I mean when I say I am making progress.

When embarking on Living Theory research many researchers begin with the question, ‘how can I improve my practice?’ However, this presupposes that the researcher knows and understands what their educational practice is and the educational nature of the standards by which they judge ‘improvement’. However, I have also seen Living Theory researchers start where they are, for instance by creating a narrative such as a brief autobiographical account or a description of what interests them, or collecting visual data to show their meanings of their practice, and to follow what energises them, rather than following a prescribed procedure.

Some find it useful to begin with the action reflection cycle of Action Research but others seem to get stuck in those cycles and never move on to asking fundamental, rather than simply pragmatic, questions and close their eyes to the law of unintended consequences.

I have previously thought Living Theory research requires conceptualising as comprising systematic and organic phases that are in a multidimensional dynamic relationship, rather than as simple cycles or spirals (Huxtable, 2008, 2012). This opens a researcher to explore and integrate insights into researching their practice to improve it, from questions, such as, ‘what is educational about my practice?’, ‘what and who has influenced me?’, ‘where can I see myself being the educator I want to be?’, those focussed by living and evolving my ikigai and understanding of my relational self and my contribution to bringing into being a society that realises cooperative values in the present.

In working on this paper I went back to ‘basics’ and asked what are the purposes of education and what distinguishes the practice of a professional educational-practitioner. At the same time I am working on trying to improve what I do in

other fields of practice, some of which are indicated on my living-poster, accessed from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/marie020617.pdf>.

I can now see more clearly at least one source of confusion in my own thinking and how by being clearer I can improve the educational conversations I have with others.

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