

Editorial Foreword

Peter Mellett

Peter Mellett

UK

The task facing the writer of an editorial foreword to an academic journal is to introduce the contents of the edition through a personal process of review that goes beyond a simple reworking of the abstracts prefacing each of the constituent papers. Having read the entire contents of the edition, the writer has to give more of a personal response than a straightforward analysis; it is permitted to show personal enthusiasms as a member of an 'informed audience' who is keen that others engage their enthusiasms as they read through the pages that follow the foreword.

As the primogenitor of Living Theory, no-one radiates greater enthusiasm for each individual's living-educational-theory than Jack Whitehead. In his editorial foreword to the immediate past edition of this journal (EJOLTS, 2016 9(2), December), Jack salutes the contributing authors for further increasing the fund of educational knowledge through their living-educational-theory accounts of their research enquiries. Speaking within the context of the current hegemony of Western / neo-liberalist knowledge systems, he emphasises how the authors' contributions are helping to spread the influence of values and understandings that form part of a "... broader project of transformation, the empowerment of diverse knowledge communities and knowledge systems critical to the long-term sustainment of people and the planet".

As the author of the editorial foreword for this current issue, I can only endorse the words in Jack's introduction: their meanings and sentiments lie at the heart of an individual's living-educational-theory account and at the

heart of the whole Living Educational Theory enterprise.

However, in coming to the task of writing the editorial forward for this current edition, I must 'plough my own furrow' – but, to promote a sense of continuity and development of thought, I shall start from the point where Jack's foreword introduces the word "transformation" as he speaks about living-educational-theory papers making a contribution to increasing hope for the flourishing of humanity. Stated in those terms, "increasing hope" appears almost as an abstracted concept – but what gives it a practical reality is the contextualised content and exposition of the papers in the edition. However, I feel that we are each still left to absorb what is in those papers – almost by a process of osmosis – to reinforce, amend and generally strengthen our understanding as living-educational-theory researchers and then, by some undefined process, bring about "transformation".

Thus, my intention, as I engage with the four main papers in this edition of EJOLTS, is to go beyond "hope for the future" and to ask what I and other readers are actually being led to *do* at the point of reading. What is going to happen to the behaviour-in-the-world of each of us, as our individual lives touch and interact with the lives of others? A given paper might make me, as its reader, think; it might offer me hope for the flourishing of humanity; but what am I actually going to *do* as the result of my reading? It is one thing to hold certain values and to have those values confirmed or challenged by the writings of others – but it is a further step for those writings to make me behave in my life in a better way. It is not enough to exchange affirming thoughts amongst ourselves within the living theory community – each of us has to 'get out there' and *do* something. For me, being conscious of needing to take this further step responds to the nagging question that always attends my contemplation of the EJOLTS project: *What use has all this effort been?*

Having stated my intention for the focus of this editorial foreword, I must add that I am contextualising it in relation to two authors who have shaped my perspective (and my enthusiasms) for the past 25 years: Rick Roderick and Michael Polanyi, who succinctly state 'where I am at'. Roderick's (1986) *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory* draws on the writing of Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1989) and speaks of Western reason as a destructive force:

"... the Enlightenment project of liberating humanity from myth and the unknown has, by becoming an end in itself, turned into its opposite – a new and more powerful force of domination. The old terror before the unknown becomes a new terror: the fear of anything that cannot be calculated, standardised, manipulated or instrumentalised. Enlightenment progress in scientific-technological knowledge (=power), while creating the objective possibility for a truly free society, leads to the domination of external nature, society and inner nature. What Lukacs analysed as the reification of consciousness was the price the potential subjects of liberation paid for the progressive overcoming of material necessity. Throughout the course of Western civilisation, the rationality of myth, as well as the Enlightenment which replaced it as reason only to become a myth itself, exposes Western reason as a destructive force. Reason abstracts, conceptualises, and seeks to reduce the concrete and the non-identical to identity, to destroy the otherness of the other. Horkheimer and Adorno locate the irrationality of what Weber analysed as rationalisation at its deepest source – the identity logic which is the fundamental structure of Western reason. Human liberation could be conceived, if at all, only as a complete break with mere formal rationality and instrumental reason" (page 40)

This view is brought up-to-date by de Sousa Santos' *Epistemologies of the South* and his concept of *epistemicide* in which knowledge is marginalised and de-legitimised by the dominant (Western academic) narrative. Both Jack's editorial foreword in the previous edition of EJOLTS and Jacqueline Delong's paper in this edition elaborate on the implications of Santos' work. As a corrective against these forces, Michael Polanyi's (1958) stance concerning personal knowledge encourages me to stand on my own two feet, as expressed by Jack Whitehead in 1985:

"... In grounding my epistemology in personal knowledge, I am conscious that I have taken a decision to understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgement responsibly and with universal intent ... It is the act of commitment in its full structure that saves personal knowledge from being purely subjective. ... Whether or not it is the truth can be hazarded only by another, equally responsible commitment."

My approach to this foreword is, therefore, to stay firmly rooted in my personal 'I' as I invite you to remain rooted in yours, as we read the papers in this edition of EJOLTS and each ask the question "What am I going to do?" – in other words "What effect is this paper having on my actions in the world as I attempt to contribute to its transformation into becoming a better place?" I have located my context for the purposes of my reading in the writings of Roderick and Polanyi quoted above: I suggest that you locate and clarify your own context before reading any further.

Looking across the four papers, I see common themes relating to personal values, tacit knowledge, the creative tensions of living contradiction, embodied knowledge, and the addressing of power relations – all expressed within the accepted forms of practice and principles that mark them out as living-educational-theory accounts. Looking at the individual papers, I see descriptions and explanations of unique educational situations generating new knowledge and understanding through the agency of Living Theory. My interest in each of these papers is to identify what aspects of their living-educational-theories I might internalise and then express as action in an improved form of my life. The observation that "... action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless" lies at the heart of the first paper *Living Research: How do we realise our capacity to create knowledge as we live towards our professional values in our practice?* – jointly authored by Caitriona McDonagh and Bernie Sullivan. These authors present an account of a collaborative practice that guides and supports undergraduate and postgraduate students and teachers carrying out action research projects in their classrooms; at the same time, they endeavour to live towards their shared core values of social justice, integrity, respect, equality, autonomy and inclusiveness. The abstract points towards practical action, as they claim:

"... we discuss how we came to recognise our capacity to be effective agents of change ... [and] examine the idea of the teacher, and also the facilitator, as an agent of change and how this has the potential to result in improvement in educational practice."

The means by which they become agents of change is through their understanding that knowledge creation can be held as a value by professional educators and, as such, must not

only be written about but lived. Change begins with each individual embracing their capacity for critical reflection and self-evaluation that contributes to improvement in practice and to improvement in the understanding of practice – and, echoing the context of my stance outlined above, they observe that "Reflective thinking, as we experienced it, is about generating new personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958)." The authors position themselves as "... critical friends [who] share a commitment to inquiry, offer continuing support during the research process, and nurture a community of intellectual and emotional caring". They ensure that all participants "... had equal opportunity to contribute to the dialogue and to the knowledge-creation ... to ensure that an ethos of equity prevailed and that the prospect of the development of adverse power relations was diminished". knowledge-creation is seen to be at its strongest when shared with others, while acknowledging "... the importance of having a sound epistemology around our research".

McDonagh and Sullivan suggest that a commitment to continuous and developmental change can be beneficial for practitioner-researchers and can be instrumental in bringing about both personal and social growth. "... we internalised the new knowledge created so that it changed how we work and live". Their aim as educators is to offer other practitioner-researchers "... the powerful approach of Living Theory Action Research so that they may change their world as they articulate their professional values and reflect critically on their practice". However, they note that "... working within higher-level organisations with established ways of accrediting new knowledge in specific fields" often impedes the ability to bring about change through their chosen processes. They can also find themselves working alongside teachers who lack the confidence or self-belief that would enable them to view themselves as knowledge-creators, this "reductionist stance" likely to be occurring because they were either unaware of or underestimated their ability to bring about improvement in their practice. I see the authors' "reductionist stance" as being directly allied with the "reification of consciousness" within "Western reason as a destructive force" identified by Roderick (*passim*).

What 'action points' do I take away from my reading of this paper? Judged from my own perspective, I affirm its content and arguments and the sentiments of the authors as, in turn, I feel affirmed by them in my own position. The authors have added to my sense of being bound within the collaborative community of practice and epistemology that itself is contained by Living Educational Theory. It is another stroke of the bicycle pump that keeps my tyres nicely inflated as I continue down the road of my life in education.

The paper *How can we live out our values more fully in our practice by an explicit exploration of our living contradictions?* draws on conversations between Ben Cunningham, a counsellor working face-to-face with prisoners in Ireland, and Moira Laidlaw, working entirely via email with an ex-offender on an Open University M.Sc. foundation module. These circumstances chimed from the outset with my own past experience of the justice system as a lay magistrate for 14 years. I remember my role in setting penalties from fines to imprisonment; I recall 'work experience' training with the probation service and visits to prisons, where the smell of capital punishment lingered in the stones – my 1994 tour of a Bristol prison began in a nondescript brick shed in the central yard: "And you, sir, are standing directly over the drop . . . don't worry, we've filled it in". The most blatant attempt to establish a dominant

position of power that I have ever experienced. Why hadn't they demolished the place? The people I committed to prison had usually reached the end of the available sentencing options. Chaotic lifestyles led many to not engage with paying fines, attending probation groups, completing community service orders: not so much 'bad' as 'sad'.

As with McDonagh and Sullivan, it is the quality of the conversation between Cunningham and Laidlaw as facilitators that acts as the catalyst in their work and research. "We spark each other off and so an idea might seem to come from one of us, and that will sometimes be the case, but I [Moira] find it difficult to isolate it always because it ... grows out of us both and our dialogue" and " We began – imperceptibly at first – to mentor each other [while] we were already acting as mentors for the people we were working with." In inviting each other into dialogues about how each can better live out their values in their practices, they claim to be, at a micro-level, embodying the kinds of values and processes they believe could pave the way towards a better social order. However, they found at an early stage that working from the premise that all human beings are equal brought them face-to-face with their deepest living contradictions.

While this paper is jointly written, the separate and distinctive voices of the two authors blend as they reflect on the quality of their own relationship (as shared concerns for compassion, tolerance, love and human equality) and their efforts to bring that same quality into their interactions with their clients.

"... it could be said that our whole work with each other and with other people has become about negotiating our own ethical and moral ways to behave in order to improve our practices. It may be true to say that we are engaged in evolving our own living ethical standards of judgement as a way of moving forward as individuals, as collaborators, and as professionals in our chosen spheres."

Here we are reminded of self-actualisation, which is of central concern to all associated with Living Theory; a self-actualisation that happens "... if at all – only when I forget myself for the sake of others..." (Ben) where there is "... a real sense that Ben's journey of self-actualisation helped Moira to find her own".

At this point, I realise that I am being drawn into this dialogue as a third protagonist, whose existence and values are being steadily questioned by the separate and blended voices of the authors in the text and by the unvoiced 'aesthetic resonances' that it sets up within me. I experience a hermeneutic process of question-and-answer as I read, and the echo of that 'living reading' remains with me as I put the paper aside. It has not added to my knowledge and understanding; it has deepened my existing understanding in a way that will adjust my future responses to situations involving 'The Other'. This paper goes beyond its immediate context of a particular aspect of the authors' lives and into the arena of our ontology and our humanity.

The introduction to Jacqueline DeLong's paper *Respecting and Legitimizing The Embodied Knowledge of Practitioners In Contexts of Power Struggles* brings us firmly to the subject of the 'paradigm wars':

"I draw insights from the work of De Sousa Santos (2014), including the idea of 'epistemicide'. Epistemicide draws attention to the ways in which the validity of indigenous and practitioner-knowledge is not recognised or is killed off in the dominant epistemology of western universities. ... This article shows how the embodied knowledges of practitioners are being made public in the context of the[se] power struggles".

Faced with the various ways in which the validity of indigenous and practitioner-knowledge is not recognised or is killed off in the dominant epistemology of western universities, she shows how school and medical systems and educational research journals might come to respect and legitimate the embodied knowledge of practitioners through their own living-theories, in terms of making original contributions to academic and professional educational knowledge.

The background is well-known where, in the general and commonly-held sense, 'the knowledge' is seen to reside in the universities and not in the schools and classrooms. Practitioners, as we know, create knowledge but it is not well-respected. Delong refers to the, dismissive and insulting words of David Hargreaves (1996) in his address to the Teacher Training Agency, in which called for an end to the:

"...frankly second-rate educational research which does not make a serious contribution to fundamental theory or knowledge; which is irrelevant to practice; which is uncoordinated with any preceding or follow up research; and clutters up academic journals that virtually nobody reads."

When considering Living Theory Research and its external constraints, Delong identifies the importance of addressing issues concerned with the meanings and representations of the embodiment of knowledge. Instead of representing knowledge as a commodity or toolbox, she claims that it is crucial for educators to expose students to authentic forms of learning that reflect embodied, dynamic, collective and 'ecological' webs of knowing. She regards Living Educational Theory as crossing Santos' "Abyssal Line" that separates the power of orthodox thinking of the dominant academic epistemologies from the disempowered "... new, nonconformist, destabilizing and indeed rebellious theory and practice". Roderick (*passim*) observed that "[Western] Reason abstracts, conceptualises, and seeks to reduce the concrete and the non-identical to identity, to destroy the otherness of the other" and Donald Schon (1995) appealed for the creation of a new epistemology for the new scholarship of knowing-in-action – I read Delong as saying that the answer lies in Living Theory.

There is a certain grim satisfaction to be had from her report that:

"I have seen first-hand the negative responses of quantitative and qualitative researchers at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference from 1996 to 2013, especially when Jack said, 'I'm just wondering if you have researched your own practice'."

Cue outrage – the reasons for which Delong believes lie simply in not understanding the nature of practitioner-knowledge and in the threat perceived by those who hold the power over what constitutes knowledge. Why do they not see that practitioner-researchers create a *new form* of knowledge? They do not take away knowledge from academics in control of who has the knowledge; there is not a finite amount of knowledge.

The main core of the paper is concerned with specific examples of Delong's own and her students' stories of oppression, constraints and transcendence. It is worth noting that she identifies the intervention of influential teachers and other leaders as necessary to effect change in power and knowledge structures. In her experience, it has become necessary:

"... for me to smooth the way for my students through 'intercultural translation' (Santos, 2014) so that the power and intimidation of the University does not prevent them from sharing their embodied knowledge and having it accredited."

It is at this point that I understand what am I actually going to *do* as the result of my reading of this paper. As a proponent of Living Educational Theory, I realise that I am no longer a supplicant for the cause in the presence of established academic norms. The established power of 'The University' states its hegemony in the flat tones of assumed entitlement. Feeling the massed ranks of Living Theory researchers now at my shoulders, I could adopt a similar stance when defending the genre. However, I know that I would simply be adopting one or the other of the positions described by Robert Donmoyer (1996) that have worked against the encouragement of a humane and open-minded approach to educational research: the *Traditional Response* (we talk sense; 'they' talk rubbish) and the *Balkanization Response* (leave 'them' to get on with their business while we get on with ours). I choose to go with Donmoyer's third way, drawn from the debates about incommensurability, in which he suggests we should strive to:

"... listen carefully, to use ... linguistic, emotional, and cognitive imagination to grasp what is being expressed and said in 'alien' traditions ... [without] either facetiously assimilating what others are saying to our own categories and language ... or dismissing ... [it] as incoherent nonsense." (p. 22)

Delong's closing page of this paper chimes with another of my questions above: *What use has all this effort been?* as she offers a quote from a celebration (Crane, 2011) of the life of her mentor Fraser Mustard:

"... Fraser would constantly ask, 'why is there such a gap between what we know and what we do?' ... This remains the question, but with Fraser gone, the rest of us must keep asking the question and demanding answers."

Delong concludes her paper with a question that Fraser frequently asked her: "So, what are *you* doing about improving the lives of young children?"

This question is most appositely and beautifully responded to by Swaroop Rawal's paper entitled: *Making the 'impossible' possible: using a Living Theory methodology to improve my practice*. Her abstract succinctly lays out the ground of her enquiry, which explores:

"... how I had a change of understanding concerning my relationship with the children of my country, and how I entered an 'I-You' relationship (Buber, 1970) of genuine love and care. The change encouraged me to negate the contradictions I experienced in my practice and take concrete steps towards the betterment of their learning. The gifts and talents of marginalized children have persistently been dismissed and it has been alleged that they are 'impossible' to teach. As I try to make the 'impossible' possible, I draw attention to the

education of rural children in India who have unequal opportunities and education; with proper motivation they can achieve beyond what some consider to be possible."

The paper is centred on Rawal's work as a part-time teacher in a small village primary school in Gandhinagar district, Gujarat. The village has a population of 300 and a total of 69 families and is battling two major socio-economic issues, lack of education, and an addiction to alcohol.

Her starting point mirrors that of many living-educational-theory researchers as she reiterates the commonly-shared belief that a high-quality education is one of the most effective ways to reduce inequalities in society and affirms that the act of improving her practice is grounded in her passion "... to ensure that my values of social justice and holistic educational practice, democracy, equality, equity, love and dialogue are lived out as fully as possible. These are the values that give meaning and purpose to my life." However, the unique stamp of her research perspective becomes apparent where she states:

"In the same way that I look at the word 'democracy' as a verb ... i.e. an action word ... I also believe we should see values as not only nouns but also as verbs. For example, 'care' is both a noun and a verb and I believe we should see 'freedom' as an action of releasing undue restrictions and a process of emancipation."

However, while she had distinguished her research to that point as "... a support to all children and not merely as a study of the situation; as a way to make their world a better place in which to live", she realised that she was not being wholly truthful: her work – and the recognition of it – were as important to her as the children. "I was teaching what was 'good' for them as if I were obliging them". At that point, she undertook to stop looking at the children she worked with through an 'I-It' lens and embraced their 'You' through an 'I-You' relationship. In this manner, she claims to share students' and her own experiences in learning as she seeks to communicate an innovative paradigm of vocational education, while using a living-educational-theory approach to answer the question *How do I improve what I am doing?*

With rural students primarily being on the receiving end of a rote-learning methodology, Rawal saw children traumatised by what is termed 'education' in modern India and decided "I only knew one thing: I wanted to bring about change".

Having conducted drama camps in Rajpur since 2008, she has touched on subjects such as democracy and citizenship, understanding emotions, evil social practices, our environment, and The Dandi/Salt March. However, this paper is an account of a film-making workshop, which was carried out with a *vocational* focus in mind.

The aim was to create a pre-vocational education workshop, for which the discipline of film-making was the target vocation. When films are recorded, they are not ephemeral and neither are they transitory like drama. They materialize into a product, making it possible for the students to see their creation. Through the workshop, the students learned about the various careers available in film-making, the fundamentals of digital film/video production and digital editing, the ground rules in acting craft and directing actors, and a basic screenwriting craft.

Besides these instructional objectives, the processes of casting, rehearsal, and location scouting, how to shoot, direct and edit a sync-sound narrative film and how

to participate as a crew member on fellow students' films and group-projects, all enhance the children's life-skills – for example creative, critical, and logical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, empathy and so on.

Through my reading, I find a solid living-educational-theory account that is full of life. I look at the bright-eyed and motivated children so alive and present in the video clips and in the text of this paper and I come away from my reading with a determination to engage more fully with reality and less so with intellectually satisfying descriptions of that reality. The reality Living Theorists see is other people's lives and Rawal's paper superbly reflects the engagement of her life with the lives of her pupils, both collectively and individually. In stark opposition, I remember that "Reason abstracts, conceptualises, and seeks to reduce the concrete and the non-identical to identity, to destroy the otherness of the other." Roderick (*passim*).

"Remember your humanity – and forget the rest." (The Russell-Einstein Manifesto, 1955).

References

- Buber, M. (1970) *I and Thou*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Crane, D. (2011). A Remarkable Canadian. *The Toronto Star*, November 20, 2011. Retrieved March 14, 2017, from https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2011/11/20/a_remarkable_canadian.html
- Donmoyer, R. (1996) Educational Research in an Era of Paradigm Proliferation: What's a journal editor to do? *Educational Researcher* AERA 25 pp.19-25.
- Einstein-Russell Manifesto (Pugwash) accessed from <https://pugwash.org/1955/07/09/statement-manifesto/> 30 May 2017
- Roderick, R. (1986) *Habermas and the foundation of critical theory*. London, Macmillan.
- Polanyi, M. (1957) *Personal Knowledge* London: RKP.
- Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London: Paradigm Publishers.
- Whitehead, J. (1985) An analysis of an individual's educational development – the basis for personally orientated action research. Published in Shipman, M. (Ed.) *Educational Research: Principles, Policies and Practice*, pp. 97–108; Falmer; London.