

Foreword

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In offering this Foreword to EJOLTS' Special Issue for publication in December 2013, I am mindful of Polanyi's point about taking a decision to understand the world from my own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising judgement with universal intent (Polanyi 1958, p. 327). I reflect first on some of the journal's five-year history in order to contextualise what is being presented in this issue as individual living theories, representing a wider achievement in the contribution to Living Theory. I look at each article in turn and then comment on the publication as a whole. I use the concept of counterpoint (Laidlaw, 2008) to explain something of the dialectical insights of this Special Issue. I conclude by offering comments on the importance of living forms and their relationship to content and significance. The usual democratic processes of review developed in this journal (<http://ejolts.org/mod/forum/view.php?id=5>) also apply for the first time to the writing of this Foreword.

Keywords: living theory; living theories; counterpoint; culture of inquiry; democratic processes of review

A (very) short history of EJOLTS

This edition marks five years of publications in EJOLTS, which was established in order to offer an appropriate space for living theorists to share and publish their work. A majority of articles in this journal have been single-authored texts, as the writers are concerned about describing and explaining their own learning, the learning of others and any influences on social formations. However, it has also been the venue for collaboration in pursuing improvements their living theories. It is worth quoting McNiff (2008) at length, who wrote the Foreword for our first issue, offering a succinct account of what EJOLTS wants to engage with:

The idea of a living educational theory is important, and highly significant. It is the idea that each person is capable of offering evidence-based explanations for how they live, as they attempt to exercise their educational influences in learning. By this is meant that a person is able to engage critically with their own thinking, and seek to influence the thinking of others in an educational way, a way that nurtures further learning. This in turn means that they are able to critique their own understanding, and that of others, through interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions and acting anew in order to contribute to new forms of personal and social interactions that are sustainable for all. This kind of critical engagement becomes part of the process of showing how a person can hold themselves accountable for their own thinking and actions as they try to make the world a better place (McNiff, 2008, p. i).

All the papers over the last five years have been concerned in one way or another with improving something in practice, and presenting this as “their best thinking to date” (McNiff, 1994¹) in the process of their own growth as living theorists. This has seen a collection of articles about, for example, the development of a nursing curriculum in Japan (Adler-Collins, 2009), the encouragement of collaboration through the use of Moodle (Hennessy, 2009), the transformation of a sibling relationship against a backdrop of political oppression (Jauch, 2010), and the encouragement of creativity in technical education (Vidović & Bučević, 2013). All the papers, regardless of author(s), professional spheres, contexts, backgrounds, places, concerns, organisations, share the idea that they have something to say that is worth saying as it relates to how they wish to develop their professional (and sometimes personal) lives. There is also a belief that pursuing the processes leading to publication in EJOLTS may contribute to a greater understanding of the world we live in, and its possible transformation through the living values such as love (Gjotterud, 2009), equality (Li, 2009), compassion (Salyers, 2012), and the democratisation of processes and knowledge (Bognar & Zovko, 2008) in the pursuit of justice and hope. You will meet all the above qualities in this issue.

However, the above are linguistic assertions; and one of the difficulties living theorists face is in the use of language to convey developments over time and their mediation through living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996). Thus EJOLTS has promoted the use of multi-media forms of representation in order to come closer to those embodied meanings (Farren, 2008; Hutchinson, 2013). And it is towards greater authenticity in the

¹ This was said in Jack Whitehead’s office at the University of Bath in 1994 as we prepared for the third World Congress in Action Learning, Action Research and Programme Management, which was held at the university that year.

representation of embodied meanings that the articles in this Special Issue make significant steps forward both within their own parameters and for Living Theory research as a wider focus.

As early as 1993, Eisner wrote of the significance of the forms of representation to educational knowledge and theory, putting forward the idea that human beings' experience, knowledge and presentation are partially created by individuals and groups. Where EJOLTS and Living Theory has gone further, it seems to me, is by exploring at the time unknown potentials in terms of technological forms as both containing and explaining that experience.

What living theorists have achieved in this journal's short history is the consolidation of shared explorations of the possibilities inherent from a line to be drawn from Polanyi's assertion of personal knowledge through Eisner's sense of the insoluble link between form and content, to Whitehead and others' research into their own living theories – and all in the pursuit of a better world. And the results of these endeavours offer us all, I would contend, hope for the future of humanity (Kilpatrick, 1953), which is one of the founding values underlying this journal.

Counterpoint

Relevant to this brief history is an idea that I began to develop in 2007 and wrote about in EJOLTS' first issue, called 'In Pursuit of Counterpoint: an Educational Journey'. Using Bach's fugue-writing as an example of what I wanted to explain in terms of my educational development, I wrote:

Counterpoint is the musical equivalent of holding the one and the many together as Socrates said... [This is shown] in his exposition about what constitutes the art of a dialectician... That purpose can be seen in [Bach's] determination to evolve the highest forms so that the voices can evolve separately and together, and for those voices to speak with authority and confidence and for those voices to do it beautifully! In educational terms... [Bach's] music represents ... a principled expression of beneficial purposes in the world, of collaboration, of the expectation that voices can work together towards goals which matter, and harmonise eventually into something even better than there was before. It is something that relies on the creativity of individuals and groups. I perceive a link between counterpoint and educational processes. (Laidlaw, 2008, p. 71)

The dialectic between individual "voices" (meant here both musically and in terms of the authors' articulation) involves balance between each voice, without subsuming the aspects of the whole which are greater than the sum of their parts. In other words, each individual voice in this Special Issue has aspects which could stand alone, because they document the individuals' own developments in learning, practice, knowledge and theory. On the other hand, the whole publication reveals a wider and more profound score. It might be said that the individual voices constitute living theories, and the summation constitutes an example of Living Theory.

From this briefest of histories I would like now to outline each of the six papers you are about to read, and then go on to say something about the papers' significance as a whole, using the above concept of counterpoint as a useful metaphor. I believe it is from the relationship between the individual papers and the whole that the greatest significance of this Special Issue emerges.

This Issue

Originally a single collaborative contribution to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in April, 2013, the writers – using Skype, Google Drive, email and the Open Review space at EJOLTS – subsequently developed their single text into the co-authored introduction and conclusion and the individual papers you can see here. The four authors present it all here as a unique contribution to the field of Living Theory and their own living theories.

Article One: *Introduction to Living-Theory Action Research in a Culture-of-Inquiry transforms learning in elementary, high school and post-graduate settings* by Elizabeth Campbell, Jacqueline Delong, Cathy Griffin & Jack Whitehead. In this paper the authors outline the shared development of a culture of inquiry acting as a framework for understanding the individual papers. They outline a series of categories that act as explanatory principles for the individual papers, which are:

- being loved into learning;
- praxis;
- students as co-researchers;
- building trust and respect;
- unveiling embodied knowledge;
- the living curriculum;
- influencing self, others and social formations;
- obstacles and challenges;
- scholarly significance;
- interim conclusions.

Article Two: *Evolving a living-educational-theory within the living boundaries of cultures of inquiry* by Jack Whitehead. In his paper Whitehead uses data collected between the times of his master's degree (1970-72), and the video-conversations in the preparation of this paper in 2013. He analyses this data in terms of the evolution of his living-educational-theory in which he integrates new insights about a culture of inquiry using the categories above. These categories emerged initially in the conversations between Liz Campbell and Cathy Griffin as they emerged with Jacqueline Delong's (2002) original work on a culture of inquiry.

Article Three: *Transforming teaching and learning through living-theory action research In a culture-of-inquiry*, by Jacqueline Delong. Delong is concerned with challenging attitudes and inspiring social transformations to both look again at status quo in education, and create her own living theory. She reveals how she worked over 17 years as a superintendent of schools in a school district of 30,000 students in Ontario, Canada, before retiring in 2007. She shows how, with the informal teacher research in the school district and with the formal research programmes at the University of Bath, that the methodology she encouraged and supported was within the Living Theory paradigm as she developed a culture of inquiry in which it could flourish. She demonstrates how working in collaboration with her much-loved colleagues in the development of this Issue, in a space where the living values alluded to earlier in this Foreword, have created a synergetic resonance that has inspired her life and work.

Article Four: *The heART of learning: Creating a loving culture of inquiry to enhance self-determined learning in a high school classroom*, by Elizabeth Campbell. Campbell describes

and explains how she created a loving culture of inquiry that enabled students to have transformative experiences, as, in their own voices, they generate their own epistemologies and ontologies. Through the articulation of four guiding questions: Who Am I? How do I Know? So What? and Now What? she offers a framework that helped students to transcend the moral, creative, and intellectual constraints of traditional education. She draws on data from the student action researchers in her own classrooms, and on her own action research in the creation of her living-theory. She demonstrates how she uses self-study, living-theory, and action research projects to create opportunities for self-determined learning.

Article Five: *Transforming teaching and learning practice by inviting students to become evaluators of my practice*, by Cathy Griffin. Griffin describes and explains how research into her Grade Six (10-11 year old) students' attitudes towards math turned into a joint action research project with her students using student feedback to inform and improve her own practice. She focuses on evidence that this sort of authentic, democratic co-learning environment can transcend the constraints of the teaching environment by improving teaching practice. She concludes that her processes can become a helpful model for students to use in order to be able to articulate their own learning, as they answer questions of the kind, "How can I improve my learning?" She reveals her own learning from the democratic evaluations of her teaching by the young students. Finally she provides evidence of the enhanced culture of inquiry in the community of learners within her classroom.

Article Six: *The significance of Living-Theory Action Research in a Culture-of-Inquiry transforms learning in elementary, high school and post-graduate settings*, by Jacqueline Delong, Cathy Griffin, Elizabeth Campbell & Jack Whitehead. In the abstract to this final paper, the authors write:

This issue of EJOLTS intends to demonstrate the capacities of teachers and students in a variety of settings to create cultures of inquiry that transform social formations within their classrooms, their schools and their school systems. These transformative changes are accredited and validated over considerable time, from 1995 to 2013. This paper follows the works of the authors from the creation of their living-educational-theories with their original living-theory-methodologies, to their integration and evolution in cultures of inquiry by masters and doctoral students and to the improvement of learning in primary, secondary and tertiary classrooms and other professional contexts across the globe. (Delong et al, 2013, p. 79)

Conclusion

Having a Special Issue in an academic journal is nothing new. EJOLTS itself has done it before, for example in December, 2011, in which the four authors write about the use of digital creativity and videos in the workplace. The four papers are linked by an overarching idea, but the papers themselves are separate and the authors didn't work together to produce their own texts or evolve relationships between them.

It is possible to assert that the six papers in this current issue of EJOLTS constellate around identical categories, that structure the individual and collective insights. However, the interconnections are much more profound than that. It is in the way in which the individual's own learning development is both explicitly and implicitly influenced and strengthened by the other papers and the collaboration towards the two joint papers that

something new and substantial emerges, which has ramifications for the future of Living Theory research. The profundity is also realised in the way in which each of the four inner papers could stand alone, but are strengthened by being read in combination. The conclusions in Article Six could be read as a synopsis of the whole, but gain immeasurably from being read in context, as both summary and distillation.

What has stood out throughout the process of the creation of this Special Issue as one of the reviewers of the original single paper (and what has now to my mind been fully realised) is the relationship of the whole to each individual paper. It demonstrates what I was writing about before in terms of counterpoint. No voice subsumes another, all voices are equal, each voice is cogent, significant and different, yet each contributes to an overall harmony and dynamic that enables the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts.



Image 1: Möbius strip (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:M%C3%B6bius_strip.jpg)

I believe that what this Special Issue has done is to achieve a cohesion and coherence, which might be likened to a Möbius strip of interconnectedness. Look at the image above, which demonstrates a folding of a strip of paper that enables a line to be drawn on both sides without a pen crossing any dividing line. The intricate interconnections show themselves in a seamlessness of values, purposes and outcomes. They are also revealed in the descriptions and explanations of the educational influences which are flexible in terms of their ebb and flow *between* these colleagues in their individual educational establishments, *to and from* the influence on their learning of their own students, and *within* the changes in the social contexts in which they live and work.

Like my sense in 2008 about the relevance of the metaphor of counterpoint to a description of what may be possible in forms of representation in Living Theory, I believe the following papers represent a highly significant move forward in the paradigm. As it is only an intuition as yet, I can offer no evidence for it. However, I will be collaborating with others in this space at EJOLTS with great enthusiasm in the coming years to see what develops.

The result of this complex development of relationships has resulted in what is to my mind both a highly meaningful step for each author in the explanation of their own living theories, and possible a leap for Living Theory itself. The one and the many are both perfectly at home here, and both are enhanced through the other. This is the kind of mutuality I was searching for in my 2008 EJOLTS paper which I represented by the notion of a pursuit of counterpoint. I believe the authors have presented us here with very sophisticated accounts, and I am delighted to be in a position to write the Foreword for this Special Issue.

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