



Editorial Foreword

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I am particularly delighted to write this foreword as 2018 marks the 10th anniversary year of the publication of EJOLTS. I am following Caitriona McDonagh's foreword to our last issue in which Caitriona shared the personal insights that she had gained from EJOLTS related to issues of continuous professional learning, contextual awareness, learning communities, questioning curricula and collaborative writing. Each of these issues is strengthened and deepened in this issue with Living Theory research from South Africa, Australia, Canada and Ethiopia.

EJOLTS' focus on the living-theories of practitioner-researchers remains highly relevant in today's turbulent world. I am thinking of the relevance of generating and sharing values-based explanations for educational influences in our own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence our practice and understandings. These explanations are created in explorations of the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind 'How do I improve what I am doing'. The values used as explanatory principles are relational and ontological in the sense that they give meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals and groups. They are values that carry hope for the future of humanity, such as love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, care and democracy. I believe that this issue of EJOLTS will stimulate you to create, share and evolve your own living-educational-theory.

In marking the 10th anniversary year of the publication of EJOLTS I want to focus on the way in which the contents of this issue are contributing to enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. The contributions by Gumede and Briganti highlight the relationally dynamic values and understandings they use in the different African contexts of South Africa and Ethiopia in the creation of their living-educational-theories. The contribution from David Wright, Susanne Gannon, Mohamed Moustakim and Dorian Stoilescu from the University of Western Australia highlights the importance of moving between a joint authorial voice and individual reflections as they use ir~we relationships to generate dynamic relational standards of judgment in the creation of living-theories. The contribution from 10 members of the Narrative Inquiry Group in Canada demonstrates how individual voices contribute to a collective narrative can be braided using *Literary Métissage* without losing the uniqueness of the individual contributions.

The first paper on *Reflections on the Development of a Black African Male Educator and Gifts of Doctoral Thesis Writing* is from Jerome Gumede in South Africa. Gumede offers a reflection after the completion of his doctoral thesis that answers the central questions of his doctoral research on, Why do I do things the way I do? What has enabled me to meet, face and resolve the challenges that I have come across in life? Gumede explains how the opportunity to reflect on his doctoral journey is emotionally and rationally rewarding and to improve his thinking and writing skills.

Gumede reflects on the originality of the contribution of his thesis to the academy in demonstrating the influence of his personal origin and naming, carer/nanny and family, childhood experiences and learning, sport and sport instructors on his personality development. Gumede's writings can be seen to be a response to de Sousa Santos' (2014) idea of 'epistemicide' (see <http://ejolts.net/node/288>). The response is in the thesis highlighting the usefulness of forms of knowledge in South Africa such as herding and *induku* (stick fighting and all the educational value it promotes in herd boys – that have not been explicitly declared as useful and included formally in education. Gumede demonstrates the connections that exist between, *induku*, herding, work, community involvement and education as they are influential in personality development. Gumede also highlights how he uses his personal beliefs and values, principally *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ukukhlonipha* (respect) in generating his living-educational-theory.

In his explanation of his educational influence in his own learning and in the learning of others, Gumede also engages with the mutual influences on his learning and the social formations that influence his practice and understandings. These are focused on the Critical Cross Field Outcomes that are part of the Republic of South Africa Curriculum from grade 1 to PhD as outcomes that have to be attained as teaching and learning takes place. Gumede suggests ways in which his beliefs and values Critical Cross Field Outcomes can be incorporated in Community Service Integrated Projects that can help learners to make their beliefs and values explicit in their learning, all to the end of influencing values-informed personal development. Gumede's paper is worth reading alongside Delong's review in EJOLTS of Gumede's doctoral thesis on 'An auto-ethnographic enquiry: Critical reflections on the influences in the development of a Black African Male Educator.' (see - <http://ejolts.net/files/313Jeromethesisreview.pdf>). Delong highlights Gumede's hope that

his study will help to decolonise the minds of those who tend to look down upon everything that is African in origin by making his readers aware that every culture has a role to play in the universe, and in the development of human personality.

The second paper on *Encounters of life and scholarship: Opening to transformations, inquiries and vulnerabilities* is from 4 contributors in the University of Western Australia; David Wright, Susanne Gannon, Mohamed Moustakim and Dorian Stoilescu.

The insights in this paper emerged from the authors' research on equity and inclusion in higher education, and on the impacts of 'aspiration-raising' initiatives promoted by universities and governments. The authors argue that for research that aspires to living-educational-theory, vulnerability needs to be experienced, encountered and reflected upon as part of the research process. The influences of working and researching within a social system are acknowledged by grounding the enquiry in the Master of Education (Social Ecology) programme that claims to examine:

Recent developments in inter-relationships between the personal, social, environmental and spiritual domains. It works with an understanding that everything we do as individuals affects others; that we are parts of the systems in which we live and take responsibility for. (<http://handbook.westernsydney.edu.au/hbook/course.aspx?course=1723.1>)

The authors explored through case studies the trajectories of individual students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education. In the exploration the experiences of the students touched the authors' lives and drew attention to points of vulnerability in the authors, as researchers. Together, they came to recognise the importance of the 'living 'I' in the research because each 'I' became a part of each of the stories told by the participants. The authors also recognize that as researchers, each 'I' is also 'culturally constructed, shaped by lived experience, and entangled in the contextually based stories and experiences of each other.' Each researcher expressed the desire to understand their embodied ontological values and commitments to living epistemological standards of critical judgment. An understanding at the heart of Living Theory research. These ontological values are included in the explanations accounting for the lived experience of learning, the learning of others and the education of social formations.

The paper captivated my imagination through the stories of how the students Kerrie, Omar, Keshi and Douglas expressed their desires to enrol in university and the futures they anticipated. In producing these stories the authors drew on the students' applications for a scholarship. These were written during their final year in high school. The stories included insights from interviews conducted as part of this project. Here is an extract from the story of Keshi, to illustrate the kind of personal and cultural differences in the experiences of the students:

Keshi points directly to her difference, 'I am a Nepalese born Bhutanese refugee who came to Australia... (7 years ago, after) living in a refugee camp... for 15 years.' The identity of the refugee fascinates her, as does the responsibility that comes with the opportunity to start a new life. 'It is youth like us who are the future... it is our responsibility to... spread the light all over the darkness of refugee camps.' She nominates 'this dream' and 'lots of hope' as direct consequences of her new life.

As the authors moved between their joint authorial voice and individual reflections they use *in*~we relationships to generate dynamic relational standards of judgment to account for their learning and for the new theoretical insights they developed into emergent aspirational change. The authors have contributed to Living Theory research something that is beyond each the individual and that is formed in the inclusional boundaries between them as a place of co-creation.

The third paper on *Braiding Values and Voice in Teacher Research Through Literary Métissage* is from 10 contributors of The Narrative Inquiry Group in Canada; Sabine Charette, Lynda Giguère, Norma Hubbard, Martin Labrie, Laurie MacLeod, Diane Mallet, Judith McBride, Sebastien Porco, Denise Schellhase and Kristen Witczak

In this article, the authors explain how they shared their experience of teacher-research within a writing collective. The individuals in the collective represent various education sectors, engaged in self-directed professional development. Their purpose is to explain, trace the evolution, and provide an example of an inquiry method, a process blending professional conversation, narrative inquiry and literary *métissage* (see McBride's review in EJOLTS at <https://ejolts.net/files/276.pdf>). The inquiry method follows the principles of action learning of encountering a problem, imagining a solution, acting in the direction of the solution, evaluating the imagined solution and modifying practice. The authors suggest that this inquiry cycle 'illustrates the merit of taking the risk of being publically self-critical within the safety of a learning community, while individual values and experiences merge into a confluence of values and knowledge.'

The authors show how it is possible to represent individual and collective selves within braided representations that include their unique voices and verbatim reflections. It is within the intersections of the strands of the braid that show the living values, hope, knowledge, and learning. They authors demonstrate how they are guided by 'the principle of consensus, by care for the enterprise of education, and by respect for our students and for one another.' Their 'ideas, feelings, and values have become braided in a *métissage* of hope, determination and love.'

What I find most inspiring is the authors' responses to a lack of support from their School Board. The authors respond to the lack of support by taking their project forward by moving outside the influence of the bureaucracy. Their response will inform others:

...those in classrooms and community spaces, as well as those working in the academy, and at policy and management levels of schools with an interest in teacher professional development of the importance of understanding and supporting the experience of educators engaging in intentional, voluntary inquiry, and of challenges faced in such undertakings.

The fourth paper on *How can I improve my practice? A journey into my personal and professional growth as a development worker engaged with gender inequalities in Ethiopia* is from Arianna Briganti an international development economist.

Arianna Briganti's living-theory explains her educational influences in learning in her work with a group of Ethiopian female students whose common denominators are poverty, discrimination, violence, inequality and resilience, hope, courage and dignity. They aspire to

a dignified life and believe 'education to be the sole instrument with which they can free themselves from the subordinated position society attributes to them.'

Briganti's research context in Ethiopia is dominated by patriarchy, a high adolescent birth rate and a low Gender Development Index. In her living-theory of sustainable development Briganti brings a notion of generativity into her theory and shows how the motivating power of love, faith in humanity and action is incorporated within her practice. Briganti recognizes the significance of gender, professionally, personally and interpersonally and explains the mutual educational influences in learning between herself and the Ethiopian women in her enquiry, 'How can I improve my practice?'

Briganti clarifies the values she holds and to which she holds herself accountable. These include love; faith in humanity; empathy; justice; dignity and gender equality. Briganti is clear that equality does not mean sameness:

'it rather means that 'women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female' ... If we want to be really fair to women and men we need to pursue gender justice by transforming the system and bringing an end to patriarchy and sexism.

As with the paper from researchers in the University of Western Australia it is Briganti's narratives that captivated my imagination as Briganti explains how she worked with some other development professionals to design and run a project aimed at providing some young Ethiopian women access to the right to educate themselves, and a way out of poverty. Here is an example from one of the narratives:

Rahma is 41 years old, mother of three daughters: Semira (25---year---old), Salwa (21--- year---old) and Fozjia (19---year---old). The family is of Eritrean origin, but Rahma and her daughters have been living in Addis Ababa for the past 20 years. Their lives have been hit irredeemably by the Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998-2000). Rahma's husband, Ismail, and father of her daughters had been deported to Eritrea where he died during the war. Rahma suddenly found herself alone in Addis Ababa, completely isolated from the community (people of Eritrean origin were discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity) with three young children and no source of income. The family was disenfranchised, thus exposed to any sorts of danger and abuses. For years they suffered from severe hunger, diseases, very often lack of water and no access to potable water, lack of hygiene, lack of a proper shelter, harassed by the community and ostracized since Rahma's disease was mistakenly considered to be HIV. In other words, they lived without many human rights. I met Rahma and the family in 2005 and since then we've been very close.

In June 2017 during our latest conversation in Addis Ababa, Rahma talks about her eldest daughter Semira graduating from university and what that means to her as a woman and as a mother.

I shall close this foreword with a posting I made to the practitioner-researcher Jiscmail with the following invitation to contribute to a 'Space for Reflection' of the Network Educational Action Research Ireland. This is in keeping with a desire to enhance the educational influences of Living Theory research as a social movement to which I see all the individuals in this issue of EJOLTS making their contribution:

I'm hoping that we can all obtain a copy of the following: Glenn, M., Roche, M., McDonagh, C. & Sullivan, B. (2017) Learning Communities in Educational Partnerships: Action Research as Transformation. London; Bloomsbury, (see Mounter's review of their book in this issue) and accept the authors' invitation in the last lines of the book:

... we are inviting you, having reflected on our book, to reveal your passion and your enthusiasm for learning together, for your own benefit and the benefit of those with whom you work. We invite you to continue this narrative by sharing your story with us on www.eari.ie . (p.164)

You could access the 'Space for Reflection' at <http://www.eari.ie/a-space-for-reflection/> with Joy Mounter's review of the book and some details of her own practitioner-research on 'How can I (do I) contribute to the creation and enhancement of the educational influences of a community of learners, supporting each other and their own development?'