

## Editorial Foreword

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### Abstract

The core of Living Educational Theory research methodology (Whitehead, 1989) and our Living Educational Theory research community is studying to understand, improve and explain our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the institutions and organizations where we live and work. In this issue, the threads of trying to affect change in the direction of our values, recognizing our living contradictions and contributing to human flourishing are evident. I feel that the papers in this issue of EJOLTS has not only reviewed where we've come from and considered where we are but also is taking the field of Living Educational Theory research into the future into new spaces and perspectives. That's really stimulating! I will address each of the articles in the order of the issue, ending with the book review and share what I see as original contributions.

In his article, *Living Educational Theory Development of a Black African (Zulu) Male Educator*, Jerome Thamsanqa Gumede, a black Zulu educator from South Africa shares a different experience from anything that I and, possibly many of us, have had. I would like to highlight the importance of a link between my notion of a "living culture of inquiry" and de Sousa Santos' (2014) "intercultural translation" because in the paper there are two Zulu terms which need quite a bit of unpacking: *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (respect). While they have been translated into English, de Santos is saying that we need to be very careful about these intercultural translations and in my notion of a living culture of inquiry, that means it has to be taken very seriously and considered deeply. I can't just assume an understanding. I've really got to work to get on the inside of how a black male Zulu educator actually makes sense of these terms.

Gumede describes and explains his learning as a student, a teacher and finally a school leader growing up in Apartheid Africa with many obstacles and challenges from lack of resources to substandard teaching and learning environments. He says:

“As a leader one faces many challenges that one has to tackle directly without fear of criticism or being ridiculed. Some of the issues that arose included disrespect for the environment, unruly student behavior, lack of parental support and school closure.” (p. 10)

I think that one of the contributions that he is highlighting in EJOLTs is the importance of coming from very different cultures in the sense of being a black African Zulu male educator and his living-educational-theory with values of *Ubuntu* (humanity) and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (respect) as his explanatory principles. This article is bringing different standards of judgement and explanatory principles into Living Educational Theory research as we are all engaged in a living cultures of inquiry where we are aware of “intercultural translation”, take seriously different kinds of values and recognize these meanings are genuinely coming from different cultures, traditions and parts of the world.

Since this is the first time Máirín Glenn has contributed an article to EJOLTs, *Co-convening the Network of Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI)*, Jack Whitehead has reviewed her doctoral thesis in this issue, *Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice*. In the abstract of her thesis she articulates her values of love, care and inclusion, values that we hear again in this article, “The paper outlines how I, too, might enhance my work with NEARI [Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland], as I develop my living-educational-theory. It is inspired by my values of social justice, care and inclusion.” (abstract)

Glenn has brought these values into an environment where people feel supported and cared for and where they become active agents in their own learning process. She says, “My work with NEARI, which is the focus of this paper, is inspired by and drawn from my ontological values around care and social justice.” It feels to me an important contribution as we move into a community that is supporting “sustained cultures of inquiry” (Vaughan & Delong, 2019) which focus on collaboration and NEARI as a collaborative. NEARI started as an action research movement but Glenn has shown how they are being encouraged to embrace Living Educational Theory research and to generate their own living-educational-theories.

Glenn provides the history of NEARI including the original concept, the processes in place, meetings with short presentations, the importance of providing a safe place and her role in it. She creates an environment at NEARIMeets where, “there is a kind of sacredness in the quality of the safe space established.” (p. 37) Her values are shared with those of the group:

“We locate our thinking and our work with NEARI in our shared values of social justice, care, fairness, inclusion, democracy and collaboration. We draw on the work of Bernie Sullivan (2006), to remind ourselves that our sense of social justice reflects an ethos of equality of respect for all. We are aware of the importance of education as a lifelong process that has “the capacity to confer on participants liberatory and life-enhancing experiences” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 1).” (p. 23)

By articulating and exploring the spirit of NEARI, Glenn is extending the professional community of NEARI and making a significant contribution to the field of Living Educational Theory research.

The significance of Parbati's Dhungana's research, *Continuous Professional Development through Collaborative Practice and Praxis*, lies in her movement from Participatory Action Research (PAR) to the Living Educational Theory research methodology by creating her own living-educational-theory. As a PAR facilitator, she communicates how 'living love' improved her collaboration, that of the teachers and the entire school, in a community school of Nepal, through action-reflection cycles. Introducing four phases (questioning living value, living collaboration, living consciousness, and living joy) of her research journey, she discusses, "...how my living love connects me with myself, with my colleagues and the teachers and how love evolves, contextualizes and enhances our values; yet at times, I'm not always living those values and I am a living contradiction." (p. 45) That is very powerful. Further, this paper provides evidence as to how her living value becomes her standard of judgement.

In this paper, Dhungana uses 'love' as a core human and/or spiritual value and 'living love' as her living value which means 'living lovingly' or being in a state of receiving and sharing love. This paper makes a significant contribution to the understanding and need for public acknowledgment of the role of love in academia and practice in general. She has problematised 'living love', not only for herself personally but also in terms of her academic/professional life.

It was significant for Dhungana that she would not have used love as a value because she felt that it would not be accepted. She realized that it was, in fact, a seminal value for her and that it lived in her as 'living love'. In her research, she found that living love helped her to be more collaborative and to enhance collaboration in individualized professional development activities. She integrates art forms into her explanations of her research including drawing, metaphors and images.

In writing this editorial foreword, I am aware that I am not a mathematician and I found some of the organizational language challenging to follow. In this article, *Living Mathematics*, Brian Williamson is breaking new ground as he represents a different perspective on teaching and learning as he explores mathematics from a Living Educational Theory research perspective, i.e. A Living Mathematics.

Williamson has made various connections between Living Educational Theory research and Living Mathematics including four cases: two from the teaching pathway and two from the research pathway. There is much clarity in the two parts of his exploration:

"In this article I ask the question 'how do I improve my practice in teaching and research here?' by exploring how I: (1) as a teacher can support mathematical thinking and the understanding of textbook concepts using a value-based approach and (2) as a researcher can enhance my mathematical thinking and modify or create mathematical models by calling upon my lived experiences, capturing and representing them in a symbolic form." (p. 98)

Through a number of case studies, Williamson leads us to various ways of looking at mathematics. By personifying numbers involved in a tug of war, he changes the learning environment to encourage more visualization and fantasy to create a Living Mathematics.

He argues “...that a collaboration between Living Educational Theory and mathematics may enrich the applicability, validity and purposefulness of mathematical models as a creative medium and an organic tool.” (p. 115) As a doodler himself, Williamson encourages the integration of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics).

The teaching strategy takes traditional making meaning one step further as it engages learners by supporting them to identify their values and beliefs in response to the mathematics they are being taught. In an exercise of calculating the mean of a series of numbers, he imagines taking part in a Personal Social and Emotional Development (PSED) lesson; a debate about the importance of the modern family. He finds the answer of a single number, the mean, to violate his values when he attaches social values to the process and concludes,

“I argue that such an activity has the potential to bring the student and the teacher closer to the mathematical forms being considered because if the values and beliefs someone cares about are embedded in an object to be studied then it works. As teaching and research are closely related, complementary activities, the relevance of a researcher’s values and beliefs about a mathematical form may usefully be considered.” (p. 105)

The research methodology gives researchers permission to connect their own values and beliefs to the mathematics. It is a unified qualitative-quantitative approach unlike the traditional mixed methods which involve two or more separate methodologies.

In his article, “*Evolving Educational Influences in Learning: collaborative communities of practice, relationally-dynamic constellations of values and praxis.*” Peter Mellett explains his themes:

“This paper contains three main themes: an examination of the claim of Living Educational Theory research to be a well-founded and credible research methodology within the field of educational research; an account of the author’s cumulative development over time as a living-educational-theory researcher; and how the author is now moving his living-educational-theory research into the future.” (Abstract)

Mellett compares and contrasts the requirements discussed by Schön (1995) and Boyer (1990, 2016) in the exploration and evidential support for the claim of Living Educational Theory research to be a well-founded and credible research methodology. After a review of his past research, Mellett connects us with his current understandings of relationally-dynamic constellations of values, collaborative communities of practice, *poiesis* and pattern thinking. While there are many original ideas in the paper, I was not familiar with *poiesis* which he describes as:

The progress of this evolution is marked by successive cycles of *poiesis* – the activity by which a person brings something into being that did not exist before – in which I create new knowledge and understanding through the agency of my living-educational-theory research. (p. 81)

Mellett describes the community that has come together to continue the work of his son and gathered around the Living Manual, as co-researchers who are seen to have *relationally-dynamic constellations of values* that align their value-sets with each other’s. In his influence on social formations and living his value of care, Mellett has committed to

continuing the work of his son through the initiation of a Living Manual, a work in progress, for the design of regenerative human settlements and disaster relief: this presents as globally significant through his active contribution to human flourishing. These concepts of regenerative human settlements and relationally-dynamic constellations of values are original contributions.

One of the EJOLTs board members, Máirín Glenn observed:

“It is a timely reminder for me of how Living Educational Theory research is not just an academic exercise that is undertaken for accreditation - though it can be. It has to do with how we can work towards making the world a better place and how denied values are a powerful motivator towards action.”

Finally, Mary Roche’s book review of Clanchy’s (2019) *Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me* brings us to the real meaning of creating our own living-educational theories: making a difference in the learning, and hence the lives of others, in this case students, to contribute to human flourishing. Roche says:

“But it is far more than a collection of anecdotes. Each section is deeply and critically reflective and asks hard questions of society and of the kinds of education system we have created, particularly in western developed countries. The book is grounded in strong ontological and epistemological values, underpinned by Clanchy’s huge sense of social justice and inclusion. As she asks blindingly critical questions of what the purpose of schooling is, and if schools serve all children equally, she exposes the deep injustices in society that are perpetuated sometimes wittingly or unwittingly in schools.” (p. 120)

Clanchy seeks to establish:

“if she is genuinely trying to help her students to improve their lives, through living her values to the best of her ability, or if she is just the ‘posh do-gooder, a Victorian lady on a mission who has not noticed that her message is obscured by her person, and the injustices of class which she embodies” (Clanchy p. 158).

Roche writes:

“It is an excellent example of a teacher actively trying to live out her educational values in her practice in ways that are caring, loving (in the sense of agape), emancipatory, life-affirming and ultimately transforming. Throughout, Clanchy shows us that she is continuously reflecting and tweaking, constantly questioning herself, and while she does not articulate it in quite this way, she is constantly asking ‘What is my concern/ Why am I concerned? What am I going to do about it? Am I living my values, or am I a living contradiction?’ (Whitehead 1989).” (p. 121)

In conclusion, I hope you enjoy this June 2020 issue of EJOLTs and reflect on its contribution to the knowledge base of Living Educational Theory research, to the Living Educational Theory research social movement and to human flourishing.

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