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## **Editorial Foreword: What is the Educational Influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories?**

Moira Laidlaw & Peter Mellett

**Moira Laidlaw**  
*Open University, UK*

**Peter Mellett**  
*Community, UK*

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This Special Issue explores the educational influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs), as it seeks to develop, deepen and spread Living Educational Theory research as a methodology with a specific agenda based on personal reflection. The contributing authors are based in the UK, India, Ireland and Canada and tackle this agenda through different experiences, finding different routes to describe and explain their journeys.

This Editorial Foreword is intended to address a wide range of readers. Some will have had a long and deep association with Living Educational Theory research, while others will be relative beginners. The EJOLTs Homepage at <https://ejolts.net/> and its links give more information, and there is a Wiki of Living Educational Theory research (access from [http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main_Page)).

However, in order for this Special Issue to be self-contained and coherent in its own right, a glossary of what Living Educational Theory research is – and what it is not – is included in Appendix A.

The contents list is as follows:

- Preliminaries (1&2)
- Introduction
- The perspective of this Special Issue
- The brief for this Special Issue – the call for papers
- The process of generating this Special Issue
- The five papers
  - a. The 'Living Educational Theory research – living-educational-theory' spectrum
  - b. An overview of the five papers
- Closing Comment
- Appendix A: The vocabulary associated with Living Educational Theory research

## Preliminaries 1

The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) publishes accounts of practitioner researchers using Living Educational Theory research methodologies to improve their practice. It is important from the outset of this Editorial Forward to this Special Issue of EJOLTs to distinguish briefly between the meanings of 'Living Educational Theory' and 'living-educational-theory' and their various abbreviations.

Living Educational Theory (with upper case) refers to a lexical definition of meaning which distinguishes it as a unique field of educational research activity. Living Educational Theory research can be conceptualised as the process that a practitioner researcher engages in to create their own living-educational-theory (with lower case, hyphenated). A living-educational-theory is an educational practitioner's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations.

- Living Educational Theory research has been abbreviated to Living Theory; shorthand versions, LET (preferred) and LT.
- living-educational-theory has been abbreviated to living-theory; shorthand versions, l-e-t (preferred) and l-t.
- Within a text, the shorthand versions require routine clarification.

## Preliminaries 2

In the course of working with the seven authors of this Special Issue, *relatability* has emerged as a common thread that runs through all five of their papers. In this setting, we understand relatability through its inter-contextual form as developed by Michael Bassey (1981, 1999, 2001) rather than in its purely interpersonal form as commonly understood. An outline of relatability within Living Educational Theory research follows.

The aim of qualitative research is to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes (as in quantitative research). However, Living Educational Theory researchers (as members of a qualitative research paradigm) are often asked questions of the sort: Are your findings generalisable? What can your research contribute? The aim of any researcher is to analyse a situation in order to understand it better and then to disseminate this new understanding for others to share and learn from. The aim of any reader of an account of that research is to seek fresh insights for effecting change within his or her own context. The concept of relatability allows the reader to ask the basic question: *'Is this research applicable / transferrable to my own situation?'* Relatability is offered as a criterion for generalisation to take place. Cukurova *et al.* (2018) summarise the situation:

... the merit of research evidence for practitioners lies in its contextual information ... Bassey (1981), in his comprehensive review of research into single events, ... argued that the 'relatability' of research can be more meritorious than its generalizability. He contended if judged by the criterion of the usefulness to practitioners, the value of educational research is in the extent to which a practitioner reading it can relate it to her/his own teaching. (p. 3)

## 1. Introduction

We shall start with the simple assertion that we hold Living Educational Theory to be a distinctive and well-founded research methodology within the field of educational research. Its genesis stems from Jack Whitehead's 1989 paper, *Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, "How do I improve my practice?"* (See: <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/livtheory.html>).

Living Educational Theory responds to Ernest Boyer's (1990) call for a new form of scholarship that offers:

... a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice and through teaching (p. 24).

It also responds to Donald Schön's (1995) subsequent call for a "new epistemology" appropriate to Boyer's "new form of scholarship"<sup>1</sup>

Living Educational Theory research can claim to meet these requirements, as an inspection of the résumé on the current EJOLTs website (June 2021) confirms:

An individual's living-educational-theories ... are evolving ... as they are embodied and expressed by the researcher through their practice. ... [They are] generated by individuals to explain their educational influences in learning in inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

Living Educational Theory research is a form of self-study research in which practitioners research questions that are important to them ... [It] is distinguishable by the form of logic, epistemology, explanations, standards of judgement and units of appraisal.

The Educational Journal of Living Theories is the public face of Living Educational Theory research. The central aim of this June 2021 Special Issue is to explore the educational influence of Living Educational Theory research, especially as constituted by the claims made in articles published in EJOLTs. The overarching title of this issue – *What is the educational influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories?* – was given as the core focus when the call for papers was posted towards the close of 2020.

However, this Special Issue will not centre on an analysis of the papers that have been published over the past 12 years, as in a standard academic review: it is not so much a *review* of the past as an *overview* of the field through current writing. Its focus is to explore the implicit claim of EJOLTs that, to publish Living Educational Theory research accounts is to have educational influence in learning. As a consequence, as we write this Editorial Foreword, we shall have a good deal to say about the *process* by which this Special Issue came into being.

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<sup>1</sup> See Living Educational Theory as a new form of Scholarship, pp. 74–76, in, Mellett, P. (2020). Living Educational Theory as a new form of Scholarship. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 13(1), 71–97. Retrieved June, 15, 2021 from <https://ejolts.net/files/357.pdf>

The process of publishing research accounts in EJOLTs encompasses five overlapping areas of activity, which take place within a collaborative community of practice<sup>2</sup>.

1. Educators who employ a Living Educational Theory approach to studying their practice in order to improve its quality.
2. Educational researchers who explore the nature of Living Educational Theory research itself.
3. Educational researchers who write living-educational-theory accounts, which they submit to the EJOLTs publishing process.
4. Reviewers and editors who work with authors to strengthen papers to be published in EJOLTs.
5. The EJOLTs Editorial Board that oversees the administrative processes, publications and furtherance of its reach and scope.

People who work professionally in the field of education or in other related fields of practice are formally operating as agents for positive change in the world. EJOLTs and Living Educational Theory research exist together within an educational research enterprise, the overall aim of which is to progress the professional and personal practices of people who are contributing to improving the flourishing of humanity.

Various associations of various people form and reform within collaborative communities of practice centred on the areas of activity outlined at 1–5 above. In this manner, the initial inception of this Special Issue, the subsequent call for papers, the formation of the authoring group and the management of their drafts through the EJOLTs publication process, all took place within continuing dialogue within the EJOLTs / Living Educational Theory collaborative community and its various overlapping sub-communities.

## 2. The Perspective of This Special Issue

The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) has generally published two issues each year since October 2008, with each issue typically including four full research papers centred on a Living Educational Theory research methodology. Over that period, a solid corpus of over 80 papers has built, and members of the EJOLTs Editorial Board have now agreed that 2021 marks an appropriate point at which to carry out a review of the past dozen years' activities. Now is the time to engage with the question, *What is the educational influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories?* A parallel and equally significant question is, *What is the educational influence of Living Educational Theory research?*

However, the overall process of researching, writing and publishing Living Educational Theory research accounts within EJOLTs follows a unique course. It involves a collective effort within a collaborative community of practice, making the traditional approach to review inappropriate. EJOLTs is the conduit into the public domain of the results

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<sup>2</sup> See *Collaborative Communities of Practice* pp. 86–88 in Mellett, P. (2020). *Evolving Educational Influences in Learning: collaborative communities of practice, relationally-dynamic constellations of values and praxis*. EJOLTs, 13(1), 71–97. Retrieved June, 15, 2021 from <https://ejolts.net/files/357.pdf>

See also: Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). Pahnesar, A. S., *et al.* (1998); Stamps, D. (1997).

of activities surrounding the principles and practices of Living Educational Theory research – activities that lead to EJOLTs and the activities that flow from it. Review, therefore, cannot be objectively conducted from the outside: it must explore from the inside in a dynamic and dialectical manner.

Thus, the question is not, "What is Living Educational Theory research?" – *but to inquire into the implications of asking this question*. On what path does asking this question take us? We are thinking that it can take the questioner into an educational inquiry that leads to the construction of their own living-educational-theory. It is not sufficient to stand *outside* the subject, to analyse it, and then to look for the construction of a definition. EJOLTs has lived through 12 years of activity involving and combining the lives of a large number of individuals: it is that corporate life that we shall be investigating within this overview.

Within a collaborative community of practice, living-educational-theory accounts are linked, to one extent or another. This perspective is the basis for this Special Issue, in which an international group of author-researchers has worked together to produce their individual and unique contributions to this issue. Rather than looking backwards into the archive of published papers, these contributions illustrate the scope of the educational influence of EJOLTs through the agency of the latest evolutionary stage of Living Educational Theory research.

### 3. The Brief for This Special Issue – the Call for Papers

The five papers that form the core of this Special Issue have been developed by leaders in the field to offer a lens through which to view the current spectrum of Living Educational Theory research. By revealing how they are improving their own practice through the living and developmental values that offer hope for the flourishing of humanity, the authors are hoping to encourage readers to discern explicitly the importance of making this knowledge public. Furthermore, the processes in which the authors engaged as they worked towards publication in EJOLTs are themselves significant.

In seeking to explore the educational influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories – through a form of *overview* rather than *review* – the call for papers requested a focus on one or more of the following areas:

- The enhancement of the quality of intellectual and scholarly, educational discourse
- The interest of EJOLTs to, and impact on, an international professional audience
- The contribution made to the development of knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory research.

The chief criterion for the development of these papers within the authoring group that coalesced around this brief is that each author reveals their educational influence as it evolves in the course of their writing. Through conversation, authors have called on each other's developing drafts for insights into their own educational influence in their own learning and the learning of others within the community of practice the authors created.

The call for papers also suggested that authors' texts should focus on one or more of the following questions that strongly associate with Living Educational Theory research and the EJOLTs enterprise:

- As an educator, what contribution has a Living Educational Theory approach made to helping me to improve the quality of my practice?
- As a researcher, what has been my educational experience of writing a living-educational-theory account which I have submitted to the EJOLTs publishing process?
- As a reviewer / editor, what has been my educational experience of working with authors to produce papers published in EJOLTs?
- As a researcher, how useful is the Living Educational Theory body of literature as a resource that informs my meta-analytic inquiries?
- What is the educational influence and international reach of the papers published in EJOLTs?

The call for papers resulted in an authoring group of seven members writing five papers under the following titles:

**1. Swaroop Rawal**

*Making Magic: what contribution has a Living Educational Theory research approach made towards helping me to improve the quality of my practice?*

**2. Cathy Griffin and Jackie DeLong**

*As educators and educational researchers, what contribution has a Living Educational Theory research approach made to helping us to improve the quality of our practice and our lives?*

**3. Máirín Glenn**

*What is the educational influence of my engagement with EJOLTs?*

**4. Stephen Bigger**

*What is the potential educational influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs)? Suggestions for Methodology and Theory.*

**5. Brian Williamson and Jack Whitehead**

*Living Meta-Analysis: what contribution could the Living Educational Theory research literature make as a resource that informs our meta-analytic inquiries?*

The titles give some indication of the focus of each paper and their numbered sequence 1–5 above is significant. Both of these points will be discussed in detail under Section 5 below.

## **4. The Process of Generating This Special Issue**

The Editorial Foreword and the five main texts are closely integrated as a result of all writers working together as a team over time, holding regular meetings and exchanges of drafts and ideas. In this manner, the strategy for generating the Special Issue evolved and

consolidated over time as the result of dialogical engagement between all nine members of this group.

We developed the Editorial Foreword over time as the main authors wrote the five main papers. We all 'kept an eye' on each other's developing texts (including this Editorial Foreword), each contributing to the evolution of the other's work-in-progress. Authors initially prepared fairly detailed synopses so that each area of the proposed issue was well-integrated with the rest but that authors did not 'tread on each other's toes'. It is worth noting that, early in this process, one author commented, "We're all really just writing one great big paper!" We are hoping that readers will start at the beginning with our Foreword and then be moved to read all five papers in sequence because, we are claiming, the entire enterprise constitutes an organic whole.

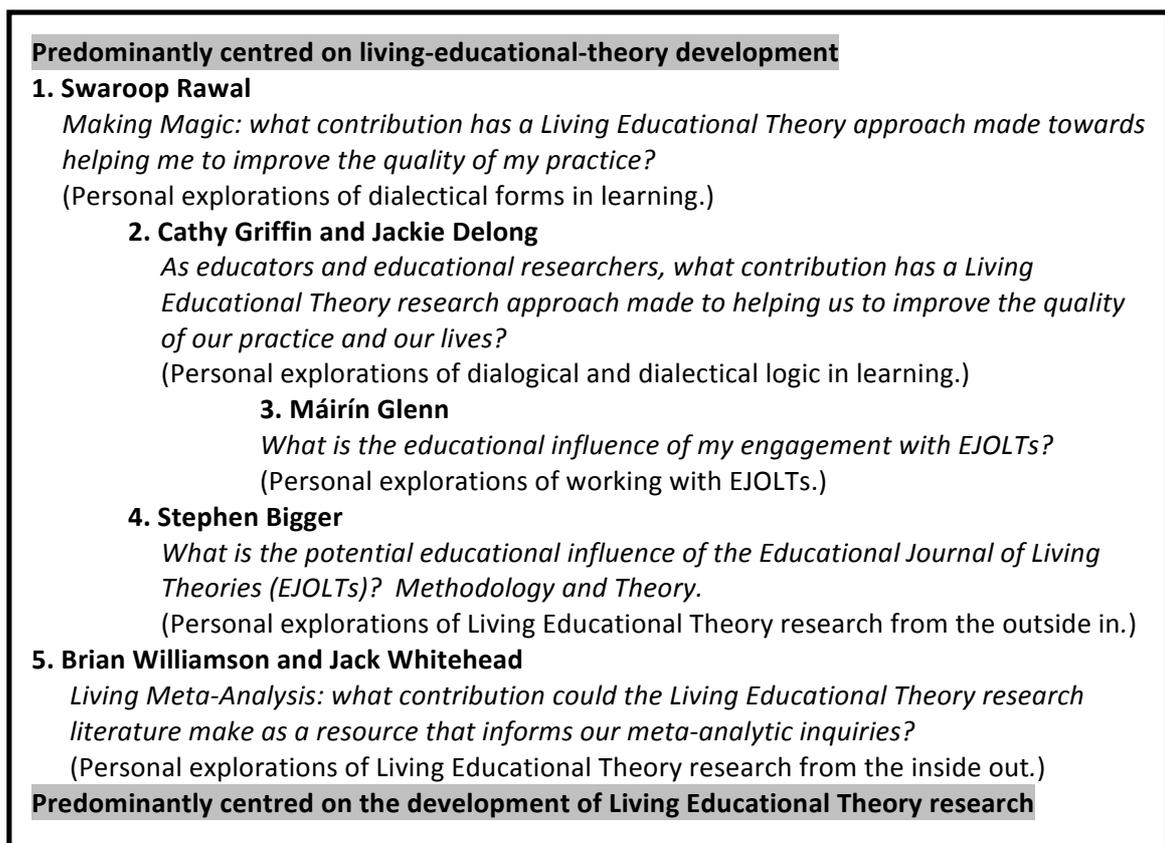
Each paper in this Special Issue can stand alone. However, on this occasion, we want to reveal some of the processes by which the whole authoring group sought to fulfil the above aims. What we seek is a more integrated publication than we have demanded of the EJOLTs production process before, because we are making claims about educational influence, and using these as standards of judgement specifically for this issue. In other words, we need to demonstrate that our processes are themselves having an educational influence in the learning of the members of the authoring group and in the learning of the community of practice the authors created.

## 5. The Five Papers

### i) The 'living-educational-theory – Living Educational Theory' Spectrum

Any paper that is published in EJOLTs can be seen to exist on a spectrum that runs between two poles: at one end are the predominantly living-educational-theory accounts which are the educational practitioners' valid explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations; at the other end, critiques of and contributions to Living Educational Theory as a distinct research paradigm predominate. The five papers within this special issue form an arc that extends fully through this spectrum, as shown in Figure 1.

This spectrum takes the reader on a journey that starts at Swaroop Rawal's patchwork and eclectic text centred on the "magic" of transformation, and concludes with Brian Williamson and Jack Whitehead's linear and developmental text centred on classification and analysis. The five papers making up this spectrum will be seen to shade into each other as the reader progresses through them.



**Figure 1.** The five papers and their relative positions on the 'living-educational-theory – Living Educational Theory' spectrum

When the papers were at an advanced draft stage, we carried out an appraisal of progress to feed into the authoring group. We first applied a common set of standards of judgment to each paper, as follows:

- A clear outline and theme
- A clear and *relatable* (Bassey, 1981, 1999, 2001) process of generation
- The educational influence (of the EJOLTs process, of Living Educational Theory research, of another author) on the given author's living-educational-theory
- A contribution to or confirmation of Living Educational Theory
- The educational influence in our learning as Editors of this special issue and as readers – and in the learning of the authors of the special issue papers.

Each author was also invited to provide standards of judgment that they would like to be applied to their paper. Laidlaw then carried out an analysis of each draft against the standards of judgment; we then held separate 20-minute conversations about each draft and then Mellett wrote a 500-word summary of each analysis and its subsequent conversation. The summaries were sent to the authors and discussed. You can access copies of the analyses and summaries [here](http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ejolts/pmmlanalyses.pdf)<sup>3</sup>, which also include links to the video recordings of the

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ejolts/pmmlanalyses.pdf>

five conversations. In addition, the whole authoring group of nine members met regularly online to discuss progress and to consider the context of each developing paper with respect to the evolution of the issue as a whole. We also held regular online meetings for the same purpose. You can access a list of these meetings and links to video recordings of the conversations from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ejolts/pmjunerecordings.pdf>.

## ii) An Overview of the Five Papers

Having discussed the perspective of this Editorial Foreword and also the processes by which Living Educational Theory research and the Educational Journal of Living Theories can have an educational influence in the learning of a researcher and a social formation, we shall now enquire into the educational influence of the five papers that make up the core of this Special Issue. This section is based on the summaries and analyses referred to directly above.

### *1. Swaroop Rawal, Making Magic: What contribution has a Living Educational Theory research approach made towards helping me to improve the quality of my practice? (Personal explorations of dialectical forms in learning.)*

This paper is a people-centred form of writing based around an autobiography of learning that draws the reader in and relates strongly, therefore, to the paper by Griffin and Delong (below). It deals with the education of young people and how the humanitarian principles of Living Educational Theory research can be used as the means to bring about meaningful improvement in the face of entrenched norms. The "Making Magic" of the title and its attendant sense of enchantment generate a transformative energy that drives the 'miracle', through which:

... teachers take responsibility for their students and their own learning; of how a teacher helps her students to learn ... magic – meaning something with extraordinary power ... the 'magic' of Living Educational Theory, my living-educational-theory and the Educational Journal of Living Theories, as they are life skills education, social work and higher education.

Rawal's patchwork paper binds magic and academic rigour together and, by doing this, she enables the contents to hit home to the reader because of its high relatability (Bassey, *passim*.) score. We can see relatability acting as the agent of educational influence inherent in the quality of communication and its sense of purpose:

As a Living Educational Theory researcher I am aware of the characteristic subjectivity of my research and thus I rely on the strength and soundness of my reflections and the details of my experience in order to invoke validity. ... a narrative of my theory and practice [provide] a tool for critical thinking as I re-asses my living-educational-theory.

As we read across this "patchwork" text, resonances are established between the author's and our own underlying common values, which cause a common path of reflection between reader and writer to open up; from this arises the possibility of the educational influence of the author affecting our own subsequent actions.

*2. Cathy Griffin & Jackie Delong, As educators and educational researchers, what contribution has a Living Educational Theory research approach made to helping us to improve the quality of our practice and our lives? (Personal explorations of dialogical and dialectical logic in learning.)*

From the outset, the authors wish to "... collaborate to share the ways in which Living Educational Theory has transformed their lives" as professional educators. Their educational relationship operates within a "culture of inquiry". Early in the paper, Griffin makes the proposal:

I really would like the structure of this paper to be a reflection of our dialogic research relationship. Can we change the format of the paper to be a dialogue between the two of us?

They then commit:

Through our dialogic ways of being, we intend to share with you the ways in which we have used our energy-flowing values as standards of judgement for explaining the nature of our educational influence...

The authors hold that dialogue lies at the heart of educational development. They wish to generate a text that is:

... not primarily an object to be put to use, or an object of experience: it is the voice of You speaking to me, requiring a response.

This perspective offers the reader direct insights into how such dialogues can take place and the effects their educational influence can generate.

The means of action is to be their "dialogic ways of being" driven by their "... values as standards of judgement for explaining the nature of our educational influence". The paper's text and recorded conversations embrace the authors' history together, their sites of practice, Living Educational Theory research methodologies, the educational influence and use-value of EJOLTs, and the influence of Living Educational Theory research on selves, others and social formations.

Through its essentially novel – almost experimental – format, the educational influence that the paper offers the reader is to see dialogue from a completely different point of view as a research method; not simply in terms of conceptualisation (through the paper) but more of assimilation (from the paper).

N.B. Rawal's paper (above) also offers the reader a linked but distinctive explanation for the power of dialogue in increasing educational influence in particular social contexts.

*3. Máirín Glenn, What is the educational influence of my engagement with EJOLTs? (Personal explorations of working with EJOLTs.)*

Glenn's intention is for her paper to be:

... a representation of my own developing living-educational-theory as I examine the educational influence of my engagement with the Educational Journal of Living Theories.

Multiple forms of educational influence within the EJOLTs processes are discussed – as a reader of EJOLTs, as a contributing author, as a reviewer of submitted articles and as a member of the editorial board – while the author undertakes a critical exploration of her emergent living-educational-theory in terms of these roles.

A strong theme in the paper draws on the author's values of care and social justice, which are identified as ontological values that inspire an epistemological stance that stimulates a learning environment and helps to improve the quality of educational influence both received and communicated.

The author is concerned to create a "fair, equitable and productive learning environment" and her multiple viewpoints offer the reader a way into determining if she is doing what she says, including, for example, her concern about wielding power as a reviewer. Ontological values – emerging as living standards of judgement whereby she can judge the educational quality of her work – necessitate cohering theory and practice and explaining them, rather than positing theory and living differently. The paper grows by holding these values to her actions in practice over time in different roles.

Taken overall, this paper is clearly a contribution to Living Educational Theory research in its concentration on the living ontological standard of judgment matched explicitly to care and social justice. It shows something of the clear dialectic between living-educational-theory and Living Educational Theory within a living dialectic that rests on personal values within personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958). We can sense fundamental living-educational-theory processes and outcomes being developed, as the author struggles for fairness (as an expression of her living values) and to see things from different points of view. It is as if she has set herself a test to see where the living contradictions lie, which can be courageous and fulfilling, and is explicitly educational in intention.

*4. Stephen Bigger, What is the potential educational influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs)? Methodology and Theory.* (Personal explorations of Living Educational Theory research from the outside in.)

The opening sentence of this paper takes us immediately to the original contribution that it makes to Living Educational Theory research, where the author states his intention to focus on:

...a discussion of my experience as reviewer for the journal EJOLTs and my archaeology of personal knowledge that underpins my values.

This word "archaeology" opens up the possibility of seeing the inner workings of the author's humanity.

Personal Knowledge goes to the heart of Living Educational Theory research as Polanyi's radical reconceptualisation of science research was applied to autobiographical research (Whitehead, 1989). This author reveals his values by digging back through his autobiography, "... when living-educational-theory is reflection on oneself and one's performance, in dialogue with self, 'interviewing oneself' as it were, about oneself." This process of interviewing is carried out within a voice that draws the reader into the author's world: the tone of the paper is utterly authentic and convincing.

The text includes four vignettes as exemplars of relevant research that the author has undertaken, each with different methodological starting points – phenomenology, action research informed by critical theory, autoethnography and evaluation – yet still encompassing a living-educational-theory as the overall focus. These bring the text even more to life and display individuals rather than ideas to show personal experience as significant and relatable (Bassey, 1996) as an instrument of educational influence. The author concludes that:

The purpose of this paper has been to clarify articulation of methodology and theory, to enable Living Educational Theory research to gain wider acceptance.

As readers, it is possible that we can discern something in ourselves that we did not discern before: it is a joint process of (ontological) discovery and a joint process of evolving our living-educational-theories. Like Williamson's and Whitehead's paper (below), this text transcends the usual way of presenting a living-educational-theory account and illuminates an alternative pathway to understanding an evaluation of Living Educational Theory research as a research paradigm and a way of life (Whitehead 2018).

*5. Brian Williamson & Jack Whitehead, Living Meta-Analysis: what contribution could the Living Educational Theory research literature make as a resource that informs our meta-analytic inquiries? (Personal explorations of Living Educational Theory research from the inside out.)*

Meta-analysis is generally understood to be the analysis of the results of several independent studies, offering an opportunity to combine results of comparable studies. In this paper, the authors define a "Living Meta-Analysis" as a qualitative meta-analysis with inclusion criteria set to Living Educational Theory research. This paper is a seminal contribution to the field because it brings a new dimension to the principles and practice of Living Educational Theory: it takes the opportunity to highlight where dialogue with other forms of educational research might be initiated and developed. Living Educational Theory research has traditionally incorporated insights from other research methodologies into its own descriptions and explanations (as explicitly does Stephen Bigger's paper above) and this paper offers the possibility of a flow of insights (through meta-analysis) in the opposite direction.

However, while research paradigms other than Living Educational Theory might extract some of the conceptual ideas from it, they do not prioritise the researcher's 'I'. The authors suggest that a meta-analysis of Living Educational Theory research could be helpful to such 'outside' researchers, but especially where they take seriously an exploration of their 'I' questions. There may be no intention to build a living-educational-theory, but the influence of Living Educational Theory would still be prominent in the study through the life-affirming energy of the other, as stated by:

The overall aim here would not be to build the researcher's living-educational-theory or to use our meta-analytical "we" but to mine and use the knowledge that has been generated by the living-educational-theories of others to advance their inquiry.

While meta-analysis might be regarded as being academically esoteric and at the frontier of most people's thinking, the authors ground their discussion by offering instances

of practical applications of work that has already been done. The definitions and examples draw the reader into the upper layers of the authors' argument relating to the advancement of Living Educational Theory practice and principles; however, the whole needs to be explored and lived with over time, as its meanings are progressively assimilated into the understanding and practice of readers progressing their own living-educational-theories.

## Closing Comment

A key point that has emerged through the process of producing this Special Issue is Bassey's (*passim*) original idea of seeking *relatability* rather than *generalisability* in qualitative research. From the researcher's 'point of view', the aim of their research is to analyse a situation in order to understand it better and then to disseminate this new understanding for others to share as they seek to improve the quality of their own practice. From the practitioner's perspective, the aim of the research is to make use of fresh insights in effecting changes within their own context. Within this setting, relatability can be seen as an effective concept for understanding and assessing the educational influence in the learning of social formations (such as communities of practice, schools, universities, and political parties) and in the learning of the people who constitute these social formations; also for understanding and assessing the educational knowledge generated by engaging in Living Educational Theory research, as disseminated through the Educational Journal of Living Theories.

The influence of relatability has been at work between all nine members of the group engaged in writing for this Special Issue, as members of the group have shared their evolving drafts over a period of four months. Educational influence through relatability can be seen to have informed each of the texts through the course of their gestation. As a parallel process while working closely together on this Special Issue over an extended period of time, we have also identified a common set of guiding principles, which are outer expressions of our underlying values that are driving our contribution to this enterprise:

- I will learn something of value to my work as a Living Educational Theory researcher
- I will experience a deeper sense of belonging to an educational community
- I will feel a greater hope in the future
- I will improve my skills as a facilitator.

We expressed these guiding principles, almost as aspirations, at the start of this work. The values underpinning them are concerned with living out the educational influence of our research, which has been pursued through the conversations surrounding the production of this Educational Foreword and the Special Issue itself. We can now re-state these principles in the past tense, confirming that they have been fully realised. Validation of this claim may be seen within the finished form of this editorial foreword and the recorded conversations available from <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ejols/pmjunerecordings.pdf>

Máirín Glenn to Moira Laidlaw:

I agree with you about the issue as a whole. I think there is something amazing about it too — a sense of opening outwards, a kind of reaching out to others who are not EJOLTs 'insiders'. Swaroop is doing it through beauty, the arts and her determination and love for

justice; Stephen is doing it through clarity of language and freshness of ideas that is like a spring shower; Cathy and Jackie have tossed the whole notion of educational research as being dependent solely on written text to the winds, while Brian and Jack are moving understandings of Living Theory outside of educational research as I know it and into a whole new realm. So yes, it is a biggie! Isn't that lovely!" (E-mail 10 May 2021, following the final Authorial Group meeting).

This is the point at which we hand over to you (each reader of this Special Issue). We encourage you to read these five papers in the light of their possible relatability to you and the educational influence they might have on your practice. Are you able to relate what you are reading to your own situation? Can Living Educational Theory research and these authors' descriptions and explanations of their educational influence – their living-educational-theories – offer you insights to improve your own? The title of this Special Issue is: *What is the Educational Influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories?* We are now asking for your engagement and for your considered response.

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## APPENDIX

### Vocabulary Associated With Living Educational Theory Research

This appendix builds on a basic definition of Living Educational Theory research to clarify and extend its meaning in association with other words such as inquiry, researcher, account, etc.

- 1 **Living Educational Theory** (with upper case) refers to a lexical definition of meaning, which distinguishes it as a unique field of educational research activity.
  - 1.1 **Living Educational Theory research** can be conceptualised as the process that a practitioner researcher engages in to create their own living-educational-theory (with lower case, hyphenated).
    - 1.1.1 Living Educational Theory research uses various **research methods** such as Action Research, Narrative Inquiry and Auto-ethnography; however, Living Educational Theory research is distinguishable by the form of logic, epistemology, explanations, standards of judgment and units of appraisal that account for **claims to have educational influence in learning**.
    - 1.1.2 Living Educational Theory research involves the 'I' in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my educational practice?'. The 'I' is focused on generating explanations of educational influences in learning: while there may be ontological aspects to the research, it is not focused on 'self-help' or 'personal development' as understood by the general population outside of educational research.
  - 1.2 The term 'living-educational-theory research(er)' is sometimes used; it is better expressed as 1.1 above.
- 2 A **Living Educational Theory researcher** (not a living-educational-theory researcher – see 1.2 above) carries out educational inquiries<sup>4</sup> using a Living Educational Theory research methodology.
  - 2.1 A Living Educational Theory researcher produces an account of their inquiry comprising descriptions and explanations, which together constitute an account of their **living-educational-theory**.
    - 2.1.1 A living-educational-theory is an educational practitioner's descriptions and explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of

<sup>4</sup> The word 'enquire' is used in the general sense of asking; 'inquire' refers to a formal investigation. Hence, 'enquire' and 'inquiry' are the preferred usages in the context of Living Educational Theory research.

social formations – as they explore questions of the sort "**How do I improve what I'm doing in my educational practice?**"

- 2.2 Living Educational Theory research (i.e. a specific Living Educational Theory research inquiry) usually takes place within the researcher's **professional practice**; a Living Educational Theory researcher's life does not constitute their living-educational-theory as an explanation of their educational influences in learning.
- 3 As all other epistemologies, Living Educational Theory is distinguished in terms of its **unit of appraisal** (what is being judged), its **standards of judgment** (how judgments are made about the unit of appraisal) and its **logic** (the mode of thinking that is appropriate from within the epistemology).
  - 3.1 The **Unit of Appraisal** within a living-educational-theory account is an individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning.
  - 3.2 A Living Educational Theory researcher's living-educational-theory is described by **explanatory principles** that are informed by the researcher's values as ethical principles and standards of judgment that emerge over time through practice.
    - 3.2.1 Any claims to improvements in practice must reveal the researcher's **values as standards of judgment** in their accounts.
    - 3.2.2 The **Standards of Judgment** are used to test the claims to knowledge of a Living Educational Theory researcher's account; they are also used to test the claims to have educational influence in learning.
    - 3.2.3 **Standards of judgment** are central to Living Educational Theory research; they are derived from the researchers' ontological and social values which develop over time as they are clarified in the course of the research.
  - 3.3 Within a living-educational-theory account, **values** form the ethical and explanatory principles and the standards of judgment.
    - 3.3.1 The **values** relating to standards of judgment are those which contribute to the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989, Section 3.); values are recognised as living and developmental rather than as conceptual and static (Laidlaw, 1996, pp. 541, 560).
  - 3.4 When living true to values that are life-affirming / life-enhancing and offer hope for the future of humanity, a Living Educational Theory researcher can claim that they are acting in a moral and ethical manner, where **morals** define their personal character and **ethics** are standards defined by groups and cultures as enduring, long-held beliefs intended to guide not just individuals, but a society as a whole.