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What Is the Educational Influence of My Engagement With Ejolts (Educational Journal of Living Theories)?

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Abstract

This paper is a representation of my developing living-educational-theory as I examine the educational influence of my engagement with the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS). Drawing on my values around social justice, I investigate the concept of EJOLTS as a medium for communicating the principles and practice of Living Educational Theory research. Throughout this paper, I will show how my values transform into explanatory principles by which I show that I am working towards, but not always succeeding at, enhancing my practice and developing a better understanding of it. As part of this process, I examine if EJOLTS is an environment that enhances learning and stimulates people, including myself, to be active agents in our own learning. The paper begins with an outline of some of the features that make EJOLTS a unique journal. This outline is followed by a critical exploration of my emergent living-educational-theory in terms of my role (1) as a reader of EJOLTS, (2) as a contributor to it, (3) as a reviewer of the journal and (4) as a member of the Editorial Board.

Keywords: **living-educational-theory; Living Educational Theory; social justice; learning environment; EJOLTS.**

Introduction

The central aim of the June 2021 issue of Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS) is to explore the educational influence of Living Educational Theory research, especially as constituted by the claims made in articles that have been published in it. In this paper, I draw on my experience, over a number of years, as a reader, writer, reviewer and now, as a member of the Editorial Board of EJOLTS. I generate my living-theory as I reflect on and critically examine the educational influence of EJOLTS on my learning in these roles.

A living-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. To clarify the terminology used in this paper, I cite the opening text of the Editorial Foreword of this edition of EJOLTS:

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). (Laidlaw & Mellett, 2021)

They further explain that the terms Living Educational Theory can be abbreviated to Living Theory... living-educational-theory can be abbreviated to living-theory (Laidlaw & Mellett, 2021).

Background

As someone who is actively involved with EJOLTS and who embraces Living Theory (LT) as a way of life, I ask myself questions like 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead, 1989 to 2020) and 'How do I enhance my practice?' (Sullivan et al., 2016). Formerly a primary school principal, I now work on postgraduate teacher-education programmes in Ireland as well as co-convene the Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI) and the Values-based Practitioner Action Research Special Interest Group (VPAR SIG) with the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI). I have also co-authored several books on exploring self-study action research and Living Theory (Sullivan et al., 2016, Glenn et al., 2017 and McDonagh et al., 2020). These experiences, as well as my own lifelong personal experiences, help to mould my identity as a teacher (Palmer, 1998) and my thinking as an educational researcher. I am using my learning from these experiences to illuminate the educational influence of EJOLTS in my learning as I seek to enhance my practice and to generate my own living-theory.

One of the basic underpinning principles of Living Theory (LT) is that researchers draw on their values and strive to enact them in their practice. I hold ontological values around social justice. My understanding of social justice is embedded in the principles of equality and respect for all people, irrespective of race, social class, ability, gender or ethnicity. I also acknowledge the position of privilege I hold as someone who does not have to struggle for food or shelter, nor do I live with threats to my everyday safety. I also acknowledge the position of privilege I hold as a teacher and academic where I might 'be

comfortable and complacent and disrupting that state of comfort and security is terrifying’ as outlined by Martinez (2012, 90). Because of this, I believe that activism for social justice should be part of our everyday human endeavour and that it begins within each one of us, in our mindset, attitudes, thinking and interactions. I believe that I should live with an intent of social justice, to the best of my ability, on an ongoing basis and in the most minute of interactions with others. This value lies at the heart of my research. I see a direct link between education and the promotion of social justice. I perceive the generation of spaces or environments that encourage autonomous and independent learning for all, regardless of ethnicity, age, dis/ability, academic background or other culturally generated ‘differences’, to be embedded within that link.

Living Theory research claims an originality of holding values as *standards of judgement* – something discussed in the Editorial Foreword of this edition of EJOLTs (Laidlaw & Mellett 2021). These standards can be aligned to actions, and researchers can thus hold themselves accountable for their actions (Wood, 2010). The creation of a fair, equitable and productive learning environment is one of the living standards of judgement I have established for myself and throughout this paper I continuously investigate if I am addressing it. I establish that I am going some way towards addressing these standards of judgement by repeatedly checking that my engagement with EJOLTs contributes to the generation of such an environment. I envisage this paper to be a representation of my own developing living-theory as I examine the educational influence of my engagement with EJOLTs.

EJOLTs as a Unique Publication

EJOLTs is unique because it is dedicated to Living Theory research and consequently it encompasses many of its own distinctive traits. Among these are how it (a) embraces theory generated from an author’s own practice; (b) engages in outstandingly rigorous review processes (both blind and peer); (c) is the only diamond Open-Access journal in this field; and (d) encourages the inclusion of visual data, which I examine below.

(a) EJOLTs promotes and publishes accounts from practitioner-researchers, from a broad spectrum of practice, who generate their educational theory in the process of researching their practice. Most papers in EJOLTs are written from an insider perspective and use ‘I’ to account for their personal knowledge. As the founder of Living Theory, Whitehead draws on Polanyi’s work and reminds us:

In grounding my epistemology in *Personal Knowledge*, I am conscious that I have taken a decision to understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his [/her] personal judgement responsibly with universal intent. (Whitehead 1989, p. 46)

Authors in EJOLTs generate their living-theory (I-t) accounts and offer their values-based descriptions and explanations ‘for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of social formations’ (Whitehead 1989 to 2021) in this process. When Whitehead uses the term ‘educational’ he clarifies it as ‘learning with a life-affirming energy and values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity’ (Whitehead 2018, p. 92). These ideas lie at the heart of Living Educational Theory research and of EJOLTs.

Research in education is predominantly undertaken from an external or spectator perspective (Kemmis, 2012) and this epistemological stance has informed thinking, policy and practice for centuries. Those involved in LT research acknowledge the significance of this research and respond to the prevalence of 'the hegemony of scholarly inquiry' that is external (Allender & Allender 2008, p. 127) and devoid of the lived reality of the area being researched. LT researchers interrogate the 'crippling mutilations imposed by an objectivist framework' and become some of the 'many fresh minds [that] will turn to the task of reinterpreting the world as it is' Polanyi (1958, p. 381).

As is expected with Living Theory (LT) research, the fresh-minded accounts in EJOLTs are told from a first-person perspective and use the term 'I' (and sometimes 'we') to narrate their research account. I see EJOLTs as an opportunity for grassroots practitioners to tell the story of their learning while generating theory from their practice. They use 'I' to narrate their story and capture the lived reality of their practice as they produce validated research accounts. This is not a self-absorbed 'I' but is instead an 'I' who is in engagement with others and always outward-looking (Whitehead, 2015). The 'I' of LT research is also continuously being validated through critical dialogue with others and is aimed towards the creation of a better society. Few, if any, academic journals promote this perspective for their authors. I see my values around social justice and fairness enacted in the generation of a space like EJOLTs, that gives a voice to the practitioner in the field with the aim of learning for 'the flourishing of humanity' (Whitehead, 2018). Bigger (2021) grasps this principle well in his paper written for this issue.

(b) EJOLTs is rigorous in its approach to research in that it embraces strict, multiple-blind review processes and a unique open dialogic peer review process as well. I will explore my learning from being involved in the review processes later in this paper.

(c) EJOLTs is an Open Access (OA) journal (and has been since its inception in 2008). The OA aspect of the journal embraces the democratic spirit of EJOLTs and reflects my values around social justice. OA implies that anyone can access any of the publications at any time and without charge. Access to academic writing and journals has come to the fore in recent times, due to COVID 19, with many journals such as *The Lancet* becoming willing to freely share their insights with others for the benefit of all (Connolly *et al.*, 2020). Until recently, access to academic journals, which are embedded in a corporate model of publishing, has generally been the privilege of those working in academic institutions and those enrolled on recognised academic programmes. As a result, practitioner-researchers and those not enrolled in the academy were excluded from accessing them. However, OA journals like EJOLTs ensure that their publications are distributed online, free of cost or other access barriers to all interested parties. EJOLTs is also a 'diamond' category journal which means that no fees or article publishing charges (APCs) pertain to the publishing of the journal. The editorial, review and production teams work in a voluntary capacity towards the production of this journal out of their passion for Living Theory as well as their commitment to fairness, social justice and democracy. While many OA diamond category journals are published regularly, there are few, if any, devoted to theory generated from one's practice, in such a highly rigorous manner and with a lifetime of over ten years.

(d) The inclusion of visual data has been part of EJOLTs since its inception in 2008. The videos and photographs help to explain and communicate meanings as well as

demonstrate explanatory principles that express author's values. Excellent examples of this usage of video can be seen in Griffin and Delong's (2021) and Rawal's (2021) papers in this issue. Many readers appreciate the clarity and integrity of this form of evidence. Readers also experience the reality of the research context as well as experiencing the video as a supplement to the reading. These ideas are supported by the recent study from Noetel *et al.* (2021), which indicates that learning is more productive when video is used to supplement learning.

I am drawn to EJOLTs because of its unique commitment to the 'I' of practitioner research, its rigorous review process, its commitment to OA and its use of visual data. I see it as an extension of my values of social justice, among others. I am drawn to accounts in EJOLTs because they reflect the reality of the lives of the researchers; they show how people try to improve life for themselves and others and they demonstrate how theory can be generated from a grassroots level. These accounts influence me, and I will explain this influence in greater detail now.

Educational Influences of EJOLTs

I draw on these unique aspects of EJOLTs outlined above as I explore my emergent living-theory (I-t) in terms of my role (1) as a reader of EJOLTs, (2) as a contributor to it, (3) as a reviewer of the journal and (4) as a member of the Editorial Board. As part of the process of transforming my values into explanatory principles, I highlight instances when EJOLTs offers readers an environment that enhances learning and stimulates people, including myself, to take responsibility for our own learning.

i) Reflections on the Educational Influence of EJOLTS on me as a Reader

As a reader of EJOLTs, I read with the lenses of my identity as teacher-educator; as a network co-convenor; as a member of the Editorial Board of EJOLTs; and as a writer about practitioner research. My reading constantly informs my emergent living-theory. In this section, I will outline my reflections as a reader of the journal under the following categories: (a) gaining deeper insight into what is meant by the term 'Living Theory;' (b) seeing the powerful, transformative nature of LT research, (c) the evolving nature of LT research and (d) the comprehensibility of EJOLTs.

(a) Gaining insight into the underpinning principles of Living Theory

Developing an understanding of Living Theory (LT) research is a complex process, one that not only needs to be lived to be understood but also must be explored in the literature and through dialogue if one is to understand it most thoroughly. I continue to enhance my understanding of LT by engaging with the papers that have been published in EJOLTs. The journal embraces the key principles of Living Theory research, including the exploration of *values* and *learning which carries hope for the flourishing of humanity*. I will outline these briefly here.

The identification and clarification of one's *values* lie at the heart of LT. Values are kernel to most, if not all EJOLTs papers. For example, delving into ideas around their values as teacher-educators, McDonagh & Sullivan's (2017) paper outlines how new learning can

emerge from the process of finding ways to support others as they conduct their living research into their practice. The creation of new knowledge represents the educational values to which they subscribed, and which framed their approach to I-t research. An exploration of values lies at the heart of Vaughan's (2019) paper too, as she unearths her values and learns to live them through her connection with her students.

EJOLTs also examines educational influences in learning – learning which carries hope for the flourishing of our individual and collective humanity. Gumede's (2020) paper outlines how he generated his I-t from his values around *Ubuntu* and *Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho* (humanity and respect). Despite personal and systemic challenges, he was driven by his passion for education. His account outlines his journey from his life as a herd boy in rural South Africa to being a successful school principal and published academic. As a reader of his paper, my own humanity begins to unfurl and grow as I am influenced not only by his flourishing but by the flourishing of the students whom he now teaches.

I have gained insight into Gumede's life and the enormous struggles he has encountered. His work has influenced me to interrogate my values, especially in the area of social justice. This awareness inspires me to ask myself 'What can I do?' in response to social injustice, as Martinez (2012) suggests. I also become more aware of the discrepancies between the global south and north, first- and third-world wealth as well as racism, sexism and the myriad of other hate-induced injustices that prevail in our society. I'm not sure I can alleviate Gumede's circumstances directly, but I cannot ignore his story. I can begin to sharpen my awareness and then develop my thinking, actions and interactions. I remind myself that social justice is not external to me, my thinking or my practice. It 'begins in one's own mind and heart and can be seen in the everyday dealings and relationships people have with one another' (Glenn, 2020, p. 26). Only when I begin to recognise how I experience myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989 to 2021) and actively see the discrepancy between the values I hold and my words/actions, can I begin to take steps to make the world a fairer and more just place (Glenn, 2021). It is this value of social justice that underpins my practice and the standards by which I hold myself accountable, as I reflect on the educational influence of EJOLTs on me.

(b) The transformative nature of Living Theory research

Living Theory (LT) research is transformative by its nature. Transformation implies that change has occurred. EJOLTs includes numerous papers bearing testament to the changes that LT research has brought to the lives of the researchers, their practice and to the social formations in which they participate. This process is well highlighted in many papers. In particular, Wood (2010), an educational researcher in South Africa, questions the quality and purpose of traditional forms of research that make little difference to the majority of children there. She is critical of certain forms of theory that are generated solely as an academic exercise, that bring about little societal or institutional change. She argues for values-based forms of research as she asks how she, as an academic, can work toward societal and educational improvement, and claims that change begins within oneself. She draws on a project she undertook with teachers from disadvantaged schools and outlines how they transformed their practice by creating their insider epistemologies and practices for HIV prevention as she helped them see their potential as agents of change. This project

showed how relevant research into one's practice can bring about transformation. The project changed Wood too, as she learned to live out her values of mutual respect and sincerity more fully in her institution. Her work (Wood, 2010) has influenced colleagues in her university as they too adopted self-study action research into their practice as a strategy to improve teaching and as a means of personal and professional transformation.

Many other accounts in EJOLTs grasp that sense of transformation too; for example, Rawal (2017) gives an account of her LT research using drama and film to transform and enhance education for children, especially girls, in the poorer, rural regions of India, a transformation that is continued in Rawal (2021). Potts (2019) outlines how his move to political activism through forms of deliberative democracy is indicative of the transformative nature of Living Theory. The transformation is clearly seen, not only in his thinking but in the educational influence he has had on others through the establishment of 'democracy cafes', held monthly in the city in which he lives. Potts' (2019) work has been influential in my thinking as I frequently evaluate my practice according to his typology of active citizenship (p. 23) which categorises the effectiveness of citizenship into three categories: the individualised citizen (who might volunteer to give a hand in a crisis), the participatory citizen (who might organise community efforts) and justice-oriented citizen (who seeks and addresses areas of injustice). Unfortunately, I often experience myself as a 'living contradiction' when I measure my practice against my values which are informed by Potts' writing on social justice, as I know I do not act as a 'justice-oriented citizen' often enough. I am aware that I have quite a learning journey ahead of me.

These accounts show the transformation that has occurred for these authors. The potential influence of authors' transformation on us as readers is difficult to track. There is evidence in EJOLTs, however, of the educational influence EJOLTs authors have on *other authors*. Parekh's (2020) paper, published in conjunction with Rawal's acknowledged influence in her learning, is a good example of this. Vaughan's (2019) paper also bears testament to Delong's educational influence in her learning, whereby she outlines her journey of self-discovery as she uncovers and validates her core values following a series of critical conversations with Delong.

Many of these accounts transform me as I read them too. I perceive this transformation to be indicative of the relatability of LT research through its inter-contextual form as outlined by Michael Bassey and described in the Editorial Foreword to this issue (Laidlaw & Mellett, 2021). These transformations cause me to reflect critically on the contribution I make towards enhancing my practice, towards living more closely to my values and to making the world a more equitable place to be. They shake me out of any complacency that might cloud my ability to live the values I hold in my everyday life and inspire me to be active in my engagement with them.

(c) The evolving nature of Living Theory research

Living Theory (LT) research is based on and is generated by living ontologies and epistemologies. Therefore, the nature of LT research is such that it is drawn from real life and, like life itself, it is ever evolving and emergent. That process of slow change is reflected in papers published in EJOLTs. Delong introduces what she terms a 'culture of inquiry' in a 2010 edition of EJOLTs and has developed it over time (Delong 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2019)

to the extent that ‘culture of inquiry’ has now become part of recognised terminology used with frequency in LT accounts. The term ‘culture of inquiry’ encapsulates the idea of engaging with LT as a community. The members of this community relate to one another in a mutually respectful, critical but caring manner, in which everyone is encouraged to make explicit their values and make themselves accountable for living according to those values in a safe, supportive and democratic learning environment. See Glenn (2020) and Griffin and Delong (2021) for other examples of what this culture of inquiry looks like in practice.

The evolving nature of Living Theory (LT) research is also reflected in Whitehead’s (2019) paper wherein he outlines the changes in how he now perceives LT. The 2019 paper is insightful and captures the development and evolution of LT in the intervening years since he first created this new discipline of educational enquiry that would bring the validated embodied knowledge of educational practitioners into the academy (Whitehead, 1989).

Similar evolutions can be seen in the field of dialogue. Collaboration and dialogue have always been key to the process of LT – seen frequently in the exploration and sharing of new tentative ideas; in the criticality that is crucial to the generation of one’s I-t; in the validation processes that are part of the structure of LT; in the final sharing of one’s theory as a contribution to the learning of others and in the education of social formations for the flourishing of humanity. Delong’s (2020) paper has now taken these elements under critical scrutiny and clarified dialogue as a fundamental research tool for LT research and other forms of action research too.

These and many other elements of the ever-changing landscape of LT research are included in EJOLTs as part of its natural ontology. These slow and emergent changes are indicative of the deep connection between EJOLTs and a real, live world. For me, they show that LT research is alive and malleable and is not a dry methodology caked in immobility and the dust of institutional constraints. I see that LT is not only aimed towards the flourishing of humanity; it is drawn from the ever-changing landscape of humanity itself. It embraces the notion of EJOLTs as an environment that enhances learning in ever changing and complex situations. It stimulates people, including myself, to take responsibility for our work and to be activists in our learning processes.

(d) The comprehensibility of EJOLTs

As I read EJOLTs, I often read with the eyes of a teacher-educator, searching for papers that encapsulate the ideas underpinning LT research for my students. This is one way in which I seek to live to my values around establishing an environment wherein students can enhance their learning. I would like if the students I teach, who have no prior experience of Living Theory (LT), could grasp the ideas of Living Theory research through their reading of EJOLTs. I am convinced that LT research is for everyone and that anyone can do it. The principles underpinning LT are understood best when lived and experienced through engagement.

I am concerned that, sometimes, the underpinning principles of LT get lost in what is occasionally a complex form of language. While all research approaches have their own conventions of language and vocabulary specific to the discipline, if the language in the journal excludes readers rather than includes them, then the experience for the reader will

be neither productive nor positive. Readers, especially those who are new to LT research, can sometimes be excluded from learning about it for this reason. I am not arguing for a dumbing down of the ideas or for adopting a colloquial writing style. Conversely, I believe that clarity in the communication of ideas is a key indicator of an author's understanding and holds important implications for the readers. As a reader of EJOLTs, I continuously look for papers that will give my students, colleagues and myself a clear insight into LT research. One of the living standards of judgement I hold around social justice is in terms of being accountable for establishing a learning environment for people who see themselves as capable of developing their potential as learners who take responsibility for their learning. I sometimes find it difficult to locate papers that are written in a clear and accessible manner and that give the insight into LT research that I seek for my students. I am aware that in these instances I do not meet the standards of judgement I have established. Thankfully, in my more recent role as a member of the Editorial Board of EJOLTs, I hold hope that I can work towards ensuring that a clearer form of language is used in more papers and thus come closer to the standards of judgement I have established for myself.

I am aware of how reading EJOLTs helps me give life to the values I hold. I see this not only in the constant reminders from the values-based accounts as outlined above but also through my encouragement of others to encounter the 'learning with a life-affirming energy and values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity' (Whitehead, 2018, p. 7). This is not a victory narrative and I am not claiming that my learning from reading EJOLTs is a panacea. I realise I have much to learn in how to curate papers from EJOLTs that will encourage and motivate learning. However, papers in EJOLTs give accounts from the authors' perspective of how they are attempting to live a more equitable life. They are expected to develop readers' understanding of how the authors' core life-affirming and life-enhancing, ontological and relational values inform and transform their lives, personally and professionally, as outlined by the Review Process (EJOLTs, n.d). I believe that bringing my learning as a reader to my work as a reviewer and member of the Editorial Board does help me live more closely in the direction of my values and help me work towards a form of the journal that people wishing to learn more about Living Educational Theory Research will find accessible. I will explore these aspects in greater detail below.

ii) Reflections on the educational influence of EJOLTs on me as a writer:

While writing for EJOLTs is a different experience from reading it, my writing *is* influenced by my learning from my reading as outlined above. In this section I will examine the educational influence writing for EJOLTs has on me as a writer in terms of (a) my awareness of meeting the criteria required by the journal and (b) engaging with the expert peer review process in the *space of co-operation* and the dialogic process involved there.

(a) Awareness of meeting the criteria required by the journal

I read voraciously around the subject of Living Theory (LT) research and teach about it, share ideas around it and write about it. Yet, when it comes to writing for EJOLTs, I find it to be challenging. The criteria for having a paper published with EJOLTs are exacting and demanding, even for writers like myself who have been involved in LT research for decades. EJOLTs states that each paper submission must:

1. Be of high academic and scholarly quality;
2. Include distinguishing qualities of a Living Educational Theory research methodology, and/or
3. Make a contribution to the field of Living Educational Theory research. (EJOLTs, 2021)

These are fair expectations at first glance but when one explores the criteria with accompanying guidelines, the demands are quite stringent. They seek context(s), purposes, processes and outcomes of the research; descriptions and explanations of the claim made in terms of theory being generated; descriptions of and explanations for one's educational influences in learning; stating values and clarifying them as standards of judgement as well as overt validation processes, among other expectations. Ironically, I was part of the team who drew up these criteria and, as an experienced LT researcher, I now find them difficult to follow myself because these are exacting expectations and demand substantial analysis and critical reflection. I am keenly aware that if I find the process difficult, then how much more difficult it must be for people who are at the beginning of their LT journey. This process is not for the faint-hearted and I am aware as I prepare to submit this paper to EJOLTs that I may not yet have addressed these expectations adequately.

These criteria and supporting guidelines, however challenging, *do* ensure that the articles published in EJOLTs are written to a rigorous academic standard. They also ensure that papers published in EJOLTs embrace an LT methodology.

(b) Reflection on the peer review process in the space of co-operation and the dialogic process involved there

The peer review process at EJOLTs is also very stringent. Following double blind-review, the vast majority of papers go through a dialogic peer review process in the *space of co-operation*. This is a process whereby three reviewers are allocated to engage in critical (written) conversation with the author in a designated space in the EJOLTs website. They help the author revise the paper so that it becomes a more robust article and fully meets the exacting standards outlined above. For the author, it calls for drafting and redrafting as well as exploring what are for many, new concepts. I have experienced the process as an author, as a blind reviewer and as a peer reviewer. It can be challenging for authors to receive feedback from reviewers that implies that a paper or a chapter is not quite good enough for publication in its current format. These are tricky waters for both reviewer and author to navigate and they call on both to be open, resilient and determined. I am familiar with my own pattern of reacting to reviews by now. I know that I will initially be slightly 'wounded' by negative feedback – even if it is constructive. Once I have given myself that time to regain my equilibrium, I can then revisit the reviewers' comments and engage with the feedback with the rigour and diligence expected from an academic submission process. Somehow, the tension diminishes when the more dialogical style of engagement in the peer review process begins with reviewers. In EJOLTs, the review process operates within the 'walled garden' of the *space of co-operation*. Everyone who is a subscribed member of the EJOLTs community (a writer, reviewer or editor) can enter the password-protected garden and can see the ongoing conversions and iterations of all papers under review. It may be a little daunting for some, but it is indicative of the spirit of openness and accountability that is the essence of EJOLTs.

I use Brookfield's (2017) concept of critical reflection in terms of using my own autobiographical notes, the lenses of colleagues, of the students I teach and of the literature, to help me reflect critically on my practice. Critical reflection not only informs how I can enhance my practice in terms of living to my values with integrity but also how I might develop an awareness of incidents of hegemony and unfair power struggles (Brookfield 2017) in my practice. Williamson and Whitehead (2021) use their critical skills in this special issue of EJOLTs as they use meta-analysis to examine the validity and internal and external reliability of EJOLTs. As a writer in EJOLTs, my thinking and critical reflection processes are heightened by the lenses and the critical questioning of the peer reviewers in the *space of co-operation*. Their words resonate strongly with me and cause me to reflect some more and to read more widely around my ideas.

You can see my response to Bigger's comments in Glenn (2020, pp. 27–8). He said:

Never before has social justice become more problematic, rejected by enough people to vote the uncaring into power. Social justice includes discussion of the causes of poverty, the massive gap between rich and poor, south and north, first world and third world.

Bigger's comments inspired me to peer outside of the limited world of my practice and to look outwards to the injustices that permeate society globally. These comments influenced me to write what I believe was a better and more critically reflective paper. They also influenced how I think. I acknowledge that I now stop and remind myself that my practice is a microcosm of the global world, where injustice and inequity in terms of racism, sexism and poverty prevail. I hold the potential to interrupt inequitable practices that in many cases, have become the everyday, invisible norm in our workplaces and are embedded in our everyday assumptions. I now not only open up these conversations with students and colleagues, but I also begin to address them in the minute details of my everyday interactions with people and in my work with EJOLTs. Social justice begins at home, as Martinez (2012) reminds us.

As I reflect on the educational influence of EJOLTs on me as a writer, I am keenly aware that engaging in LT research means that the researcher must devise their unique research methods that emerge from their ongoing engagement with the research process. Meeting the criteria outlined by the journal is a challenge but I laud EJOLTs' commitment to a high quality of rigorous research. I have also learned that the dialogic process that emerges through peer review, in the *space of co-operation*, though daunting at the outset, is an opportunity for growth as well as critical engagement. Drawing on my values of social justice when I write for EJOLTs, I work towards creating and participating in an environment that generates learning for practitioners who see themselves as capable of developing their potential as motivated orchestrators of their learning. Being a writer for EJOLTs is not only a process of personal or professional learning for me, it is a learning that influences my engagement with others as I offer my explanation of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding (Whitehead 2018).

iii) Reflections on the educational influence of EJOLTS on me as a reviewer

The first stage of review for EJOLTS is a blind review process. This initial blind review process is important for paving the way for the peer review stage because it ensures that only papers that meet or have the potential to meet the expected criteria will reach the peer review stage. As a reviewer, I have learned over time and to my disappointment, that I am sometimes more inclined to use unnecessarily negative comments in a blind review than when in open peer review. The anonymity of the author seems to diminish my sense of empathy in my initial interactions with all blind reviews. I now actively try to embody the values I hold around social justice as I work towards tempering my thinking and my feedback with fairness and an understanding of the potential of a paper.

The open peer review process is the second review phase in EJOLTS, and it is a more nuanced process. In this phase, the reviewers are known to the author and a conversation begins in the open review process which takes place in the *space of co-operation*. This is a dialogic process that is unique to EJOLTS and exists between two or three hands-on reviewers and the author. Over a period of months, the author, in discussion with their reviewers, hones the paper until it is ready to be presented to the Editorial Board who will deem it fit for publication, or not. The most interesting part of this process is the learning that is embedded in it, where both reviewer and author want to achieve a high-quality publication. This is not a process for the faint-hearted and it is never a site of groupthink or conformity. It always involves questioning the author's thinking, asking the author to clarify their meaning as well as asking the author to engage with concepts that are hitherto unknown to them. I have experienced this open-peer review process as a supportive, but critical, form of dialogue that not only enhances the thinking of the author but also that of the reviewer. It is a microcosm of the 'culture of inquiry' that Delong describes (2010-2019).

As a reviewer, I am always fearful of the possibility of colonising the thinking of others as I engage with authors in the peer review process. As I work in the *space of co-operation* with authors, I am aware of the power, or the perception of power, that I hold as a peer reviewer. As outlined above, my values of social justice inform my thinking and my actions. They heighten my awareness of coercive power and remind me to avoid colonising the thinking of authors while encouraging them to produce the best paper they can.

EJOLTS is aimed towards practitioners who wish to generate their living-theory (l-t) from their research in their practice. This is one of the principles that underpin Living Theory (LT) research. Yet, it is difficult for all practitioners, especially those who are not involved in an academic programme, to have the academic language to submit a paper that meets the high academic standards expected by the journal. Therefore, a dilemma arises that has its roots in Schön's (1995) topography of the swampy lowlands of practitioner research. Schön (1995) described practitioners as occupying the swampy lowlands of practice while the theorists occupy lofty high ground that may have little bearing on the reality of the lives of the practitioners. He denounced such systems and called for a new epistemology that assumes that the practitioner can hold a store of tacit knowledge which can be realised as social practice (Schön 1995). I am committed to the idea that LT research is for all practitioners and is based on a new epistemology of practice. I perceive LT as a grassroots movement for people who wish to work towards enhancing their practice. Yet I fear that

many practitioners may have difficulty publishing their accounts in EJOLTs. I experience myself as a living contradiction here because my values are not commensurate with my practice as a reviewer. Despite much reflection and reading around the theory/practice conflict, and creative conversations with others, I have not yet been able to solve this dilemma. This special issue (EJOLTs, 2021) is, in part, trying to address this problem.

Similarly, the difficulties experienced by authors whose first language is not English is a complex problem, for both authors and reviewers. As reviewers, we frequently see that both the quality of the ideas and the theory being generated by the author is worthy of publication, but the language of academic English is weak. Because EJOLTs is a non-funded journal, there are no translation services available for authors. In cases such as these, and on an *ad hoc* basis, people in the broader EJOLTs community generally try to help the author to produce a standard of writing that establishes that the paper is published in an acceptable standard of English. See, for example, Jauch's (2010) paper translated from German by Moira Laidlaw of the Editorial Board. Translations such as these are painstakingly slow and time-consuming but are indicative of the democratic principles that underpin LT research and EJOLTs. Translation services can often be prohibitive in terms of cost to the author.

I perceive the educational influence of EJOLTs on me as a reviewer in how I continuously try to enhance my practice in this field. I hold a heightened awareness of my values of social justice as I review papers in a respectful manner with all authors while attempting to create an environment for them to generate their I-t as they clarify and express their learning. I can see my values being denied as practitioners sometimes might feel excluded from publishing in EJOLTs because of their lack of academic language. I know I do not meet the standards of judgement, as established at the outset of this paper, in terms of creating an environment that generates learning here. I am troubled when I reflect on the conflict that exists between the openness of an academic journal to public entry, and the impenetrable systems and language that might be constraining it.

iv) Reflections on the educational influence of EJOLTs on me as a member of the Editorial Board

Even though we refer to the Editorial Board as an 'it', it is in fact a group of people who meet once a week online and email one another throughout the week. The relational, dialogic and inclusional interactions of the Board become the enactment of the LT philosophy that lies at the heart of EJOLTs. The Editorial Board at EJOLTs works towards ensuring that each issue has a collection of papers of a high standard that meet the criteria outlined. The Board is also involved in review processes as well as promoting the journal, encouraging authors to submit, and extending the readership of the journal. As an Editorial Board, we work towards meeting the majority of these expectations. We address them as we live to our individual values and our collective values as a group, as 'I' becomes an 'I~we' relationship which embraces a mutually respectful way of being (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2006). We are aware of our collective responsibility as an Editorial Board to our role in ensuring that EJOLTs continues to communicate the principles underpinning LT research. We are aware that in our role as Board members and in our editorial work we give life to the values we hold that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. In this paper, I have outlined in detail how I give life to the values I hold; and my colleagues who are also publishing in this special edition of EJOLTs will do similarly.

I celebrate the fact that EJOLTs is an inclusive journal and that accounts from a multiplicity of cultures are both encouraged and published in it. The recent paper by Parekh (2020) was published both in English and Gujarati, the author's own language. This is a new direction for the journal and is indicative of the innovative nature of the Editorial Board as well as the collective values the Board holds around inclusion. It is an important innovation too because it makes the research accessible to a broader readership than the traditional papers published solely in English.

My biggest concern as a member of the EJOLTs Editorial Board has to do with the conflict I experience around our need to increase our visibility, extend our readership, and broaden our authorship. Most academic publishing is now led by metrics and dominated by big, for-profit publishers who hold much of the world's research output to hostage in terms of finance, competition and market (Eve, 2021). These ideas are far removed from EJOLTs' values-based accounts in which authors offer explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations (Whitehead, 1989) in the process of researching questions such as, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' as outlined on the journal's homepage at www.ejolts.net. These principles run contrary to the current trends within corporate models of publishing. EJOLTs has distanced itself from the trend towards publication as an economic transaction over the past decade. In recent times, the Board has begun to work towards increasing the journal's visibility and extending its readership while holding its independence, its OA status, its no-fees and no-APCs culture with pride. It is an interesting exercise to try to get a Diamond OA journal included in the bigger databases, without succumbing to the finance-driven, power-wielding philosophies of multinational publishing houses. This is a journey the Editorial Board is currently undertaking but it is an important one because it unearths the hegemony that is pervasive in multinational publishing companies, where knowledge and finance are intertwined.

As I reflect on the educational influence of EJOLTs on me as a member of the Editorial Board, I believe that I, alongside my fellow Board members, have a responsibility to take action here. I believe that people cannot do research in their practice in a way that is different or creative unless they are aware of the possibilities of doing innovative research and engaging in the literature, especially that of LT research. I am convinced that reading EJOLTs can help raise awareness that there are many ways of generating educational theory, which differ from the traditional methodologies. I perceive it as a form of deliberative democracy (Potts 2019) ensuring that all voices are heard so that informed decisions can be made. As an Editorial Board, we have a responsibility to raise awareness of the possibilities and potential of creative and innovative approaches to research – particularly LT research. I know that, as a Board member, I can give life to the values I hold as I work towards extending EJOLTs readership so that it becomes a setting which enhances learning and stimulates people to be active agents in our own learning. I believe that participating in the Editorial Board of EJOLTs allows me to be active in the areas of EJOLTs that we agree as a Board need improvement.

Concluding Thoughts

I delight in the fact that I read, write, review and am a member of the Editorial Board of EJOLTs. I am convinced of the transformational nature and potential power of Living

Theory (LT) research to influence not only learning, but society itself, as the values we hold, carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. I feel privileged to be part of that community. In the process of writing this paper, I have developed a new awareness of my responsibility as an LT researcher in developing EJOLTs as a 'home' for current thinking in the area of LT.

As I reflect on the educational influence of EJOLTs on me as a reader, I develop a keen insight into the importance of EJOLTs both as a repository for the key principles of LT research as well as a live document of how it is being articulated in the lives of the contributors. I am aware of the subtle evolution of LT over time and its potential to transform people's lives. I am concerned that, sometimes, readers may be excluded from being able to grasp the powerful and potentially life-changing aspects of LT research.

I confess that I sometimes struggle with the naturally shifting sands of LT research, even though I embrace the idea that it is alive and therefore naturally evolves over time. In particular, the sense of LT as a global social movement unsettles me a little. This is not because I disagree with it – in fact, I embrace it and do all I can to promote it, as the process is commensurate with the values I hold. It is my/our responsibility to encourage learning for the flourishing of humanity that is generated from values we hold, in a milieu of education dominated by economics (Whitehead 2014) and performativity (Ball 2012). I am, instead, concerned that as the focus of LT research, and as a consequence EJOLTs itself, turns towards change at a global level, that thoughts of the practitioner in the field, whose theory forms the basis of the LT movement itself, is getting lost. I have outlined earlier how EJOLTs (and, perhaps LT research) struggles to balance these principles. It is a dilemma with which we must grapple and is indicative of the chasm between the openness of an academic journal to public entry, and the impenetrable systems and language that might be constraining it.

I have claimed in this paper that, as I draw on my values of social justice, I have explored EJOLTs as an experience or an environment which might enhance learning and stimulate people, including myself, to take responsibility for our own learning. I believe that I have shown how my values transform into living standards of judgement by which I have demonstrated that I am working toward enhancing my practice as a member of the EJOLTs community and developing a better understanding of it. I would like to thank my reviewers for engaging with me and for helping to make this paper a more coherent document. I believe that, with their insights, I have outlined my emergent living-theory in terms of my role (1) as a reader of EJOLTs, (2) as a contributor to it, (3) as a reviewer of the journal and as (4) a member of the Editorial Board but appreciate that this is a work in progress.

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