



Foreword

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It is indeed an honour to write a foreword to this first edition of the Educational Journal of Living Theories. This new journal will, I believe, become a seminal site for published work that will have profound implications for how educational theory is understood in contemporary debates about the creation of educational knowledge and the significance of its uses for the future of human wellbeing and planetary sustainability.

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

The word ‘theory’, as in ‘living educational theory’ means, broadly speaking, ‘an explanation’, and explanations contain observations, descriptions and analyses of the thing in question. We can offer theories, or explanations, for how cars and clocks work, and also for how we live our lives. Most of us give explanations for how we live all the time. To take a trivial example, if someone asks you, ‘Why do you talk to yourself when you work out mathematical calculations?’ you can say, ‘I talk to myself because I can actually hear myself articulating the different steps of the process, which seems to help me work out what I am doing. Look at the calculation I have just done as I have demonstrated the process’ and you produce the evidence of another successful calculation. To take a more serious example, if someone asks you, ‘Why do you practise as you do? Why do you insist on looking for the best in others?’ you can respond, ‘I practise as I do because I wish to show how I hold myself accountable for my way of living. I look for the best in others, and in myself, because I believe that, by doing so, I can contribute to my own and other people’s wellbeing.’ And you produce the evidence of your life to communicate your experience of wellbeing, in the hopes that your articulation of the significance of your own practice may influence others also to adopt similar life-affirming attitudes and practices by learning from your example.

Yet there is a difference between the idea of a living educational theory, and its manifestation as a person’s living educational theory. An idea is important as a key first step in enhancing practice, indicating a state of mental preparedness, willingness and purposeful intent. An idea exists in the mind; action is manifested through the body. The idea is that the person is able and willing to give an account for what they are doing, much like Foucault’s (2001) idea of *Parrhesia*, the capacity to give an account of ourselves to ourselves and to others. Foucault says that it is important to give such an account because we are capable of taking, and should take responsibility for our actions in the world, and we should speak the truth of that experience. It therefore becomes a moral responsibility to offer such an account, an explanation for how and why we do the things we do. Turning the idea into action can then transform into and manifest as a living theory of practice, the lived expression of the political will necessary to take action in order to enhance the experience of living for oneself and for others. This can happen through a critical consideration of one’s own thinking and actions in the world, and how these may be improved.

Engaging with one’s own thinking, and taking action in relation to that thinking can, however, be difficult for many people, because it means standing up for what we believe in, actually living up to what we profess. This can mean placing oneself in harm’s way from the exercise of disciplinary power that inevitably becomes stirred when a person decides to speak and act for themselves within a context where some people are not allowed to speak for themselves, which is the case in many social interactions. It takes real courage to stand up for what you believe in, yet, as the saying goes, if you don’t stand up for something you will fall for anything, which is what too many people end up doing.

The stories in this journal are stories of courage and of purposeful, intentional educational action, stories that show how their authors decided to speak their truths from the authority of their own experience and the humility of learning from that experience, and produce the evidence and articulate the living values-based criteria and standards of judgement they feel are reasonable to judge the validity of their claims to know their own practices. These are extraordinary and profoundly important stories, because they show the processes of knowledge creation in action, as people engage with the awesome

responsibility of accounting for themselves. If everyone did what the authors in this text are doing, the world would become a different place overnight.

Perhaps the key message to come out of reading these accounts is that we can all do the same, within our own contexts. Perhaps we cannot take action within the large contexts of daily living; we cannot immediately influence economic policies or influence public thinking on dysfunctional practices such as racism. We can however take action in our personal and local contexts; we can change the way we think and act personally, by reflecting critically on what we are doing, and then produce our public accounts to show how our critical engagement has indeed influenced our thinking and inspired us to do things differently and better. The stories in this journal are stories of how people have learned to do this, and how their learning has influenced their actions in an educational way, in a way that shows they have made themselves critical and are testing the educational validity of those changes they have made in their lives. And these stories of learning can in turn influence new learning, the learning of listeners, as listeners reflect on what they can learn from the stories, and perhaps write their own stories of improving learning in order to improve action.

There are no limits to the human imagination, as Jean-Dominique Bauby (1997) demonstrated in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, when, locked into a body that no longer functioned after suffering a stroke, he explored the capacity of his perfect, totally intact mind as his way of retaining contact with the world of everyday living. Bauby's is perhaps the most appalling situation in which any person can find themselves; it is called locked-in syndrome, when the mind functions perfectly within a paralysed body. Yet locked-in syndrome happens in many ways. Many people are locked in by others as part of their daily life experiences, as in Guantánamo Bay, or in power-constituted organisational or personal relationships; and many decide to lock themselves in, by deliberately choosing to believe that they are not able to speak for themselves, or perhaps can get quietly by without doing so. Indeed, it is perfectly possible to do so. Yet this is not the way to influence processes of personal or social transformation. No one can die for us; no one can live for us. It is up to each one of us to live our lives in a way of which we may feel proud. It is up to us to speak our own truths, with humility and commitment, to show how we hold ourselves accountable for ourselves, that we do not lock ourselves into the comfortable prisons of existing knowledge and established ways of doing things, but fully engage our limitless imaginations in the quest for finding ways of living lives that are life-affirming for all.

The papers in this journal give us insights into the processes of how we can do so. The rest is up to us.

I commend the journal to your unbounded imaginations, as you, and I also, seek to find ways in which we can enhance the quality of our lives and the lives of others through our action enquiries.

References

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