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Editorial Foreword

Máirín Glenn

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*Independent
Educational Consultant*

Network of Educational
Action Research in
Ireland (NEARI)

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As researchers engaging in the process of Living Theory, we often need to pause and to take a break from the busyness of our everyday lives. We think about what we are doing, about the values we hold, and we reflect critically on how we live them in our lives – or not. Reflection is usually a quiet, calm, solitary activity.

However, as we engage in Living Theory research, we find that right alongside our need for reflection, lies an equally important need to share insights, thoughts and not-quite-formed ideas, as well as ideas with which we are more familiar, through dialogue. Dialogue, educational conversations and the sharing of ideas are key elements of the process of Living Theory research and are generated alongside deep, critical reflection. At that nexus-point between contemplation and dialogue lies the ‘magic’ of Living Theory, where the individual ‘I’ can potentially become ‘we’, where values become actions, and where small ideas can have an influence in the flourishing of humanity. The articles in this edition of EJOLTS capture a lot of that magic.

No specific theme was attributed to this edition prior to publication and yet a common theme seems to have emerged of its own volition. The pivotal role that dialogue and educational conversations hold in Living Theory is articulated in each article in this edition of EJOLTS and weaves its way through the whole journal. Some conversations take place between the authors and some take place within the article itself. Some of these conversations are of the traditional face-to-face variety and some take place over video-conferencing and some take the form of writing letters and emails. Some dialogue takes place within institutions, some cross thousands of miles across state boundaries, while others go across continents, each one igniting learning for the flourishing of humanity around the world as they go.

Bohm (2004, p. 7) reminds us that he sees dialogue as a '*stream of meaning* flowing among us and through us and between us... out of which may emerge some new understanding'. He sees this new shared meaning as the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together. The articles in this journal show how new understandings do indeed emerge from educational conversations and that many of the new, shared meanings we encounter here have the potential to become the glue that holds society together.

Educational conversations seem to influence certain aspects of our learning (see Glenn *et al.* 2017, pp.16-21). For example, when we engage in dialogue, we clarify our thinking a little. As we articulate our ideas and listen to others, we either change our ideas or embrace them more solidly. Regardless of our response, we learn through dialogue. We also influence the learning of those with whom we engage in dialogue and we become more aware of the responsibility we hold around using words wisely and effectively. Generally, there is an expectation in the field of Living Theory, that participants who engage in dialogue engage with one another in a mutually respectful manner – a quality that is iterated through these journal-articles here.

Dialogue can also help alleviate pain for people who are struggling professionally or personally as well as give people an opportunity to become more creative and courageous in their thinking and practice. The potential influence of an educational conversation cannot be underestimated as people seek a better world and a better way of being in that world. The articles in this edition of the journal capture that sense of influencing people through mutually respectful dialogue very well.

Jacqueline Delong's article, *Dialogic relationships in living cultures of inquiry for the creation of living-theories*, forefronts the role of dialogue as she outlines her educational influence in her own learning and the learning of her colleague, Michelle Vaughan. Delong describes the educational journey she took with Vaughan as she supported her in her exploration of Living Theory, over a period of ten months and some 2400 km apart. The authors began their learning journey when they met at the 10th ALARA World Congress in Vermont, and then continued their educational conversation through e-mail and video- conferencing on Zoom (and Vaughan's subsequent article is also published in this edition of EJOLTS). Throughout the text, Delong uses both the communications via e-mail and the video data from their conversations to support her claim of her commitment to building respectful, democratic and caring relationships within a 'culture of inquiry' and her ongoing support for practitioner-researchers. Beginning with a review of previous articles she has written and papers she has presented and continuing on to the conversations she has with Vaughan, she builds up her case to demonstrate her values-based ways of being in supportive, caring, educational relationships.

She highlights the 'empathetic resonance' that is evident in the video clips included in the article. The clips capture the essence of her exploration into her educational relationships and how she encourages and supports others so that they experience being 'loved into learning' as outlined by Campbell (2011). The authors discuss their understanding of curriculum and the idea of 'living curriculum' as part of the learning journey. Delong's article is no whimsical foray into idle chat. It is a rigorous account of her learning as she delves into her own understanding of being

supportive as she gives support to Vaughan. The account is interwoven with extracts from email correspondence and videos-clips which are presented as evidence to support her claim. The thoroughness of Delong's work shines through the article as she recounts how she draws on the views of a validation group that she has convened, as well as the views of the EJOLTS reviewers to strengthen her ideas and her work. The power of learning from and through dialogue is evidenced in the quality of her support for Vaughan, in Vaughan's learning as outlined in her responses in this article and Vaughan's own subsequent article, as well as in the input of the validators and EJOLTS reviewers. Delong is clear about her educational influence as it extends outwards from this article through the readers' engagement with it. She concludes her article by describing Living Theory as movement that is growing,

“... individuals like Michelle commit themselves to influencing their students who are also taking this approach into their worlds and practices. They join us in improving ourselves and the world that we inhabit for the flourishing of humanity’.

The second article in this journal also draws on the theme of educational conversations and the power of dialogue. Jerome Gumede and Peter Mellett's paper is entitled, *Forming a 'We' through a good-quality conversation*. It traces the process the two authors undertook from being two separate individuals - who have never met - gradually, over a period of nearly a year, to be able to speak and write as an authentic 'we'. The article explores how a genuine 'we' can be created from the individual 'I's. Gumede and Mellett are both Living Theory researchers who come from the very different cultural traditions of South Africa and England respectively. They began their learning-experience by exchanging emails and writing and sharing their extended papers to explain their ideas. Mellett uses the terms 'good-quality conversation' and 'respectful editor' to describe the quality inherent in the email conversation the authors have undertaken. He sees a 'good-quality conversation' as one that is undertaken with respect, careful listening and trust and where each participant brings out the strengths of what is said by the other. He asks, "How do we incorporate each other's evolving story into our own as the conversation proceeds?" Gumede and Mellett acted as 'respectful editors' for one another, each growing a picture of the other as they assimilated their new knowledge of one another.

The article uses the third person to indicate the narration of the story, and then includes personal commentary as 'I' to denote the author's personal point of view. Gradually, as the article progresses, the reader sees the article being written by the collective 'we' of the two authors. It draws on the work of Santos' (2014) ideas around intercultural translation and how two people from very different cultures can blend their individual 'I' voices to a composite 'we' that can create shared meanings.

The conversation between the authors begins by exploring their previous writings, their family histories and values. The authors then explore ideas pertaining to the traditional (*orale*) and Eurocentric (*literate*) education that they each experienced, in some detail. The examination of their common values around respect and patience are reflected in Ubuntu and draw on Eze's (2010, p. 190) ideas on Ubuntu as a recognition of the "other's uniqueness... as we create each other". They also look to their family photographs to illustrate the commonalities they have chosen to identify within the spirit of Ubuntu. The authors are both educators and they examine the idea of curriculum and an 'alternative' curriculum. As the article unfolds for the reader, the progression from the voice of 'I' to 'we' becomes apparent in the

writing. They conclude the article by claiming that they can now justify their claim to be able to write their Living Theory research as ‘we’ and have demonstrated their educational influence in their own personal learning and that of the other. They claim that they have no evidence, as yet, of influencing social formations with their theory. However, they do throw out a challenge to readers as they ask them to consider a series of questions including:

“How can we make a better contribution to the flourishing of humanity through our understanding of Ubuntu that we have developed between us?”

I believe that Guamede and Mellett (albeit unconsciously) echo Delong’s assertion (see above), that the Living Theory movement is growing, and developing into a space where people commit themselves to join others as they work towards an education for the flourishing of humanity (as outlined by Whitehead 1989, 2018).

The continuing of educational conversations and the outward trajectory of the Living Theory movement lies at the heart of the third article in this edition of EJOLTS. It is Michelle Vaughan’s, *Learning who I am: The Exploration of my guiding values through a Living Theory methodology*. In her paper, Vaughan outlines how she embarked on her experiences of Living Theory research. She consciously chose to document her experience as a new scholar of Living Theory research, and as an educator in the field specifically, so that others, embarking on a similar journey with Living Theory would have a space in which to explore. Her article begins with a serendipitous meeting with Jacqueline Delong at the ALARA World Congress in Vermont in 2018 – the same meeting referred to by Delong, in her article in this edition of EJOLTS.

Vaughan explains how she felt she had become negligent about the attention she paid to her core values as she reflected on her learning at this congress, and this sets the scene for her article. She then goes on to outline how she uncovers and reconnects with her core value of connection with her students. The clarity with which Vaughan explores her values and articulates how she sees them enacted in her practice is one of the highlights of this article. Her honesty, “to learn who I am, I had first to admit that I didn’t know”, and her tenacity in trying to ensure that all aspects of her practice, were commensurate with her values are nearly effervescent throughout the article. She begins her article by outlining a key moment from her early teaching career and then continues by discussing her response to some theorists on the themes of engaging and connecting with students. As she problematises her ideas, she uses quantitative data drawn from a longitudinal study to generate evidence to support her claims. This is an innovative use of quantitative data, especially in a time when, in the general literature, there is an ever-widening gap between quantitative data and the lived reality of the life of the educator (Kemmis, 2012). Vaughan goes on to discover that some aspects of her work as an online tutor are not as commensurate to her values as she would like them to be.

Through honest conversations with her students, through “truly listening” to them, she learns to become more responsive to their needs, their life goals and stresses, and begins an action research cycle based on this insight. Vaughan explains how her learning evolved once she learned to uncover her core values, bringing her ‘core values to the surface’ and then make sense of them. She tells how

she learned to share her story with people: “making new pathways for this energy to travel”.

Vaughan is aware of the educational influence Delong has had on her and her learning. She hopes that she is helping Delong, in turn, to fulfill her potential too. Vaughan concludes with her vision of her contribution to the Living Theory movement:

“By modeling for me how to support others in developing their ideas about living-educational-theory, I am now able to advocate for the role living-educational-theory *must* play in our development as practitioners and scholars.”

The image of the ‘stone-in-a-pond rippling’ nature of Vaughan’s contribution to the extending influence of educational conversations is clearly visible here.

The theme of connection and ‘the act of truly listening’ is also echoed in the fourth article in this edition of EJOLTS, when Anne Jesudason asks *How do I improve my practice of training midwives and nurses in the use of Q-Pulse?* In her paper, Jesudason explains how she too focuses on the listening process in order to help her enact her values in her practice. She explains that she was able to develop the value of listening in care-provision, which subsequently fed into her current values. Jesudason works as a midwife manager in a maternity hospital and her research is based on her work there. Her article opens with a statement around her educational values. She explains that she holds respect and openness as her values. She sees listening in a trusting atmosphere as a key component of her value of respect, and similarly she sees a participatory approach in terms of understanding people’s need as a key component of her value of openness.

Her workplace is a large, urban maternity hospital, where the use of policies, protocols and guidelines (PPGs) are advocated by the governing body of the hospital to ensure safe provision of care for patients. The PPGs in the hospital are kept up-to-date and are accessible by staff through an electronic document control-software called Q-Pulse. As she embarks on her research, Jesudason chooses an action plan developed by Whitehead (1989) that asks, “What is my concern?” and ‘Why am I concerned?’ as the opening stages of enquiry. Jesudason’s concerns lie in the area of training midwives to use Q-Pulse as she finds that many are reluctant to use it and prefer to use the hardcopy of PPGs. As a first research-cycle, she draws on her values of respect and openness as she explores the usage of Q-Pulse. As a second cycle of research, she designs an e-learning tutorial to help midwives and nurses access Q-Pulse. As Jesudason reflects on her research, she explains how she becomes aware that she is not living as closely to her values as she would like. She outlines how she involves the nurses and midwives to participate in the design of the e-learning tutorial as she works towards enacting her values in her practice. She includes extracts from the statements of her critical friends and her validation group to support her claim. The significance of Jesudason’s research is outlined in the concluding section of her article where she explains her capacity to theorise her practice as contributing to the learning of others. She hopes to continue her learning to improve and understand her practice in the future.

The final section of this journal includes three book reviews. The first review is written by Jack Whitehead on *Research as Transformative Learning for Sustainable*

Futures: Global Voices and Visions edited by Peter Charles Taylor and Bal Chandra Luitel (2019) and published in Leiden, Netherlands by Brill Sense. Whitehead recommends this book and suggests that it is particularly useful for introducing Living Theory researchers to Transformative Research, to ideas about Transforming Culturally Situated Selves, to Envisioning Transformative Pedagogies, and to Sustaining Transformative Pedagogies, as outlined in the book. While Whitehead recommends all submissions to the book, he particularly recommends the introduction by Taylor and Luitel as they explore the idea that education for sustainable development is essential to help resolve our proliferating global crises.

The second book review, also written by Jack Whitehead, is on *Conferences as Sites of Learning and Development: Using Participatory Action Learning and Action Research Approaches*, which is edited by Otrun Zuber-Skerritt (2017) and is published by Routledge. The contributions to this book focus on learning and on ALARA conferences as sites of learning and development. Whitehead similarly recommends this book to enhance and deepen the insights of Living Theory researchers.

Zuber-Skerritt embraces the ideas that society needs to shift from the negative energy of fear, competition, control and war to the positive energy of faith, love, hope and creativity: “Clearly, we need to conceptualize and practice not just learning conferences but Loving Learning Conferences”. While Whitehead agrees with Zuber-Skerritt’s ideas, he argues that living-theories go beyond conceptualisations as Living theory researchers hold themselves accountable in their explanations of their educational influences in learning.

The final book-review in this edition is written by Jacqueline Delong. She reviews the second edition of *Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research* by Caitriona McDonagh, Mary Roche, Bernie Sullivan and Máirín Glenn, which will be published in August 2019 by Routledge. This book outlines classroom action research which aims to support professional development. The authors describe and explain the process - giving personal examples - and provides reflective questions and suggestions for further reading. Delong says that this is an enjoyable and informative book, which would be of great assistance for those wanting to engage in educational conversations, practice-based self-study, and Living Theory research.

As this edition of EJOLTS comes into publication, I invite you, our reader, to engage with, reflect on, and continue the powerful educational conversations that have emerged from this edition. Let us watch these articles and reviews weave their educational influence, as they invite you to continue to ignite learning for the flourishing of humanity around the world as you engage with the ideas here.

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