

## Raising Voices Using Dialogue as a Research Method for Creating living-educational-theories in Cultures of Inquiry.

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### Abstract

In this article, I make the argument that dialogue as a research method has evolved to the point that it is now the significant means by which I describe and explain the nature of my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations and create accounts of my own living-educational-theories. I explore how visual data provides evidence of dialogue as research through alternative ways of knowing and representing and also articulate some of the obstacles and constraints in dialogue as a research method. As a result of my dialogic way of being, I share data of my 'loving educational conversations' with practitioner-researchers around the globe that provide evidence of my work in raising their voices through the creation of their living-educational-theories in cultures of inquiry. I continue on a lifelong path of trying to improve, asking the Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 1989) question, "How can I improve my practice and live my values more fully?" while encouraging and supporting others to do the same.

**Keywords:** Living Educational Theory research; Practitioner-research; Dialogue as Method; Action Research; Alternative Forms of Data Representation.

## Framework

The article is framed under the following headings:

- Purpose
- Introduction
- The early years of raising practitioner-researchers' voices
- Evidence of my dialogic way of being over time
- Visual data as evidence of dialogue as research
- Obstacles and constraints in dialogue as research method
- Going forward / Next steps

## Purpose

I intend to develop an argument that dialogue is a practical and rigorous research method that, along with other methods such as action-reflection cycles, video-analysis, journals and narrative inquiry, can strengthen the data used for supporting a claim to know. It has been used extensively by various practitioner-researchers although not so much using the particular language of 'dialogue as research method'. It has become self-evident to me recently in my research and publication of articles in the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* (DeLong, 2019; Vaughan & DeLong, 2019), that it is part and parcel of the cultures of inquiry that I create with practitioner-researchers locally and globally where practitioner-researcher voices are raised. In my 'loving educational conversations' as I "love them into learning" (Campbell, 2011), I draw insight from Erich Fromm's (1960) point from his *Fear of Freedom* where he says that if a person can face the truth without panic, they will realise that there is no purpose to life other than that which they create for themselves through their loving relationships and productive work (p.18). I am constantly on a path of trying to improve, asking the Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 1989) question, "How can I improve my practice and live my values more fully?" and encouraging and supporting others to do the same.

## Introduction

In this article, I draw on my prior writing and dig deeper into the complexity of my meaning and experience of using dialogue as research method, particularly in my work in encouraging and supporting practitioner-researchers in creating cultures of inquiry for the creation of their living-educational-theories. I start with the examination of commonly understood meanings of *dialogue*. The Oxford Dictionary definition of *dialogue* is:

"... a discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed towards exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem. It is derived from the Middle English from Old French *dialoge*, via Latin from Greek *dialogos*, from *diagesthai* 'converse with', from *dia* 'through' + *legein* 'speak'." (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/dialogue>).

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As MacInnis and Portelli (2002) explain, trust, humility, and commitment are required for dialogue to take place; Freire (1970) states that dialogue:

“... does not seem to be excluding the emotional content of the conversation...The caring, concern, and connectivity proposed by Jane Roland Martin (1988) is needed to create the balance necessary to give all human experience its proper due (MacColl, 1992)... Thus, dialogue requires an awareness of and a commitment to embrace those attributes necessary for effective communication and exchange of ideas to take place, as opposed to taking on the form of an informal conversation with no specific aims or direction.” (p. 36)

From Wegerif (2008) on Bakhtin, I include the idea, “an inclusive space of dialogue”:

“...relationships between things are very different from relationships between voices (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 138 and 162). For each participant in a dialogue the voice of the other is an outside perspective that includes them with it. The boundary between subjects is not, therefore, a demarcation line, or an external link between self and other, but an inclusive 'space' of dialogue within which self and other mutually construct and reconstruct each other.” (p. 353)

When I share the nature of a culture of inquiry (Delong, 2002) and extend the language to include “living cultures of inquiry” (Delong, 2019), I do so in the sense that it is a relationally dynamic space that is changing and evolving each time it is created. For this culture to emerge, I propose that time be committed to creating this inclusive space where researchers can feel safe and comfortable to reveal their vulnerabilities, so that they can describe and explain the nature of their educational influence in their learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations through their values as explanatory principles as they create their own living-educational-theories. From David Bohm (1996), I acknowledge that:

“While we don't have 'rules' for the dialogue, we may learn certain principles as we go along which help us – such as that we must give space to each person to talk. We don't put that as a rule; rather we say that we can see the sense of it, and we are learning to do it. We see the necessity or value of certain procedures that help. We give space. People will gradually learn to give space to the others to talk.” (p. 13)

Because of my dialogic way of being, I have found that “loving educational conversations” (Vaughan & Delong, 2019) with colleagues, critical friends, and students have become part of dialogue as research method for me and that visual data are essential to deepening and conveying my thinking. In mentoring others to create their own living-educational-theories, the dialogic processes inherent in email and, especially, Zoom and Skype video recordings, enable me to clarify my thinking and enable others to do the same (Vaughan, 2019; Delong, 2019; Vaughan and Delong, 2019). When we have respect for the “narrativity of experience”, we can “promote empowered practitioners” (Anderson and Page, 1995):

“Discussions should not be concerned so much with how we structure our programs or content for a knowledge base, but rather with how we choose the processes we use to engage with practitioners around the knowledge base that they already possess. Only by

taking the narrativity of experience seriously can we produce dialogue and critical reflection in our programs, and model the process necessary to promote empowered practitioners and democratic institutions.” (p. 133)

My writing over the past 25 years (DeLong, 2019) demonstrates my sustained commitment to building ‘loving educational relationships’ as I encourage and support practitioner-researchers to create their own living-educational-theories within a culture of inquiry (DeLong, 2013). I am dialogic by nature; that is, when I am in dialogue with others, I am formulating my thinking and requesting the thoughts of others to challenge or solidify my assumptions. Moreover, I am intentional about living my value of “loving others into learning” (Campbell, 2011) and I have both created and researched cultures of inquiry where practitioner-researchers know (Griffin, 2011, 2013; Campbell, 2011, 2019; Vaughan, 2019) that they are in a safe place for sharing their vulnerabilities. Brown (2012) states that, “Not only can we not deeply love, we cannot know the truth of who we are without experiencing vulnerability.” (p. 32). My culture of inquiry shares commonalities with Huxtable’s (2012) “living-boundaries”. She describes a living-boundary as a trustworthy, co-creative, multidimensional, relationally dynamic space (Huxtable, 2012). I also feel a connection to Robyn Pound’s (2014) concept of “alongsideness”:

“Values of alongsideness act as explanatory principles and standards of practice and evaluation. As an epistemology, alongsideness employs Living [Educational] Theory research (Whitehead, 1989). Accessibility for participants unfamiliar with this research is increased by calling the developmental process ‘enquiring collaboratively’.” (Abstract)

The ontological importance of dialogue in relationships informs this approach to educational conversations as a research method. The nature of my influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations can be seen through the videos and emails, embodied in a form of inquiry that focuses on dialogue and uses values as explanatory principles. The dialogue is an important and legitimate research process whereby I am showing my educational influence with Michelle Vaughan (DeLong, 2019; Vaughan, 2019; Vaughan & DeLong, 2019). To me this is self-evident and not revolutionary, as Shotter (2011) says:

“It is our spontaneous, embodied ways of seeing and acting in the world that we change... we change in who we ‘are,’ how we relate ourselves to our surroundings. But to say all of this is not to say anything very revolutionary, for such a form of ‘research’ is already a part of our everyday practices; it is only revolutionary to recognize that fact.” (p.191)

Within my living-educational-theory research methodology, the standards of judgment are my “living standards” (Laidlaw, 1996) that I use to evaluate the validity of my claims to knowledge. In my living-educational-theory, these include the relationally dynamic values that form the explanatory principles in 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 my practice and understanding. These standards of judgement that I use to judge the validity of my claims to know my educational influences in learning, are focused on the validity of the explanatory principles I use in my explanations of educational influence. I think that you will see that at the heart of my explanatory principles are my understandings of the nature of my educational relationships.

I hope to do justice to the significance of this form of research in terms of alternative forms of representation (Eisner, 1997) to share the authentic reality of learning within relationships through digital visual data. Further, I wish to recognize some of the barriers, obstacles and constraints for dialogue as research to unfold.

## **The Early Years of Raising Practitioner-researchers' Voices**

I start with some socio-historical context. As the practitioner-researchers in the Master's cohorts and mentees that I have supported can tell you, I repeatedly exhort them to speak with their own voices about their own embodied knowledge and never to let others, no matter how kind they may be, to speak for them. Liz Campbell wrote that at the top of her data wall as a constant reminder. I draw from the field of Dialogic Self Theory (DST) to validate the significance of dialogic relationships contributing to a democratic society:

"It is a central feature of DST that every party involved in the process of dialogue receives a voice to speak from his or her specific point of view and is given the space to express his or her concern in its particularity and uniqueness. Therefore, dialogical relationships require the responsibility of all parties involved to contribute to a democratic society in such a way that voices are not silenced, denied or suppressed on the basis of race, gender, age or any other social or personal characteristic." (Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 8)

Creating a culture of inquiry is essential in my support of practitioner-researchers creating their own living-educational-theory. My use of the word 'culture' builds from Bohm's (1996), "the collectively shared meaning" and Said's (1993) definition. For Said, culture means two things in particular:

"First of all, it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. ...Second, and almost imperceptible, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought." (Said, 1993, pp. xii-xiv)

A culture of inquiry is a safe, supportive space wherein practitioner-researchers are enabled to share their vulnerabilities, to make explicit their values, to hold themselves accountable for living according to those values and to create their living-educational-theories. They learn to recognize when they are not living according to their espoused values and are what Jack Whitehead (1989) calls "living contradictions."

My initial work in action research/Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead, 1989) was encouraging and supporting educators (teachers, administrators, consultants, early childhood educators), to conduct informal research, which, for some provided a springboard to joining our Master's cohorts for legitimation by Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. The creation of the Master's program is described in Chapter Three of my thesis (Delong, 2002, pp 202-221)

With Ministry of Education funding, the adventure began (Delong, 2002):

“Linda [Grant] drafted the proposal which would include four Ontario boards of education, Ontario Public School Teachers’ Federation (OPSTF), Television Ontario (TVO), Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and Queen’s University. The proposal was awarded \$200,000 in June of 1995. From this point emerged the birth and growth of action research in my life and in my board.” (p. 158)

I started in 1995 by supporting a group of seven, two administrators and five elementary school teachers, who created, shared and published their action research projects (Delong and Wideman, 1997). The focus was on action research as professional development. From an article that Ron Wideman and I wrote in the Ontario Public School Teachers’ Federation journal, *News*, (Delong & Wideman, 1998), we shared the significance of action research as a professional development process and of giving teachers, “a greater voice in the development of the knowledge base of their own profession”:

“Action research has the additional benefit of placing teachers at the centre of the process of creating educational knowledge. Traditionally educational knowledge was developed by “experts” in universities and government who expected this “knowledge to be implemented” by teachers. To strengthen the teaching profession, practitioners must have a greater voice in the development of the knowledge base of their own profession. Action research enables teachers to use their investigations to develop their own living theory of education and to share that “living” theory with the larger community.” (p. 8)



**Image 1.** Ron Wideman and Jackie Delong.

See our pleasure working together to improve the world for teachers.

One of the teachers in the research group, Bev Macdonald, wrote:

“It’s very intimidating at the beginning, but don’t let that stop you from taking the risk. Because in the long run you have control. You have control of every single step of the process. You have control of the question that you start off with. You have control of the steps that you want to take. I find that as a professional growth model it’s the best one that I’ve come across. It’s the one that meets my needs.” (*ibid.*, p. 6)

The full description of my systemic influence creating a culture of inquiry in the Brant County/Grand Erie District School Boards is located in the third chapter of my thesis (Delong, 2002):

“The second part of Chapter Three analyses how I have managed to provide sustaining support for inquiry, reflection and scholarship as a systems manager. It focuses in particular on my influence on the development of a culture of inquiry and reflection as I mobilize system supports and then create sustained supports through contributing to building communities and networks. The *systematized knowledge* that Catherine Snow (2001) is

searching for already exists in my board. I begin with my initiation into action research, the beginning years in Brant, the supports that I built up to provide sustained support for the teachers and principals in my district and as an additional benefit in other districts." (p. 10)

During the years 1996–2007 as I built a culture of inquiry, reflection and scholarship, data accumulated in my own thesis and in the school district teachers' informal (not for credit) action research outlined in seven volumes of "Passion In Professional Practice" <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/ActionResearch/passion/index.html> that I supported and edited. Director of Education for the Grand Erie District School Board, Peter C. Moffatt, articulated his support for action research as, "the highest form of professionalism" in the first volume (Delong, 2001):

"The highest form of professionalism is the on-going, self-generated pursuit of improvement and excellence. Teachers and administrators who are involved in action research demonstrate and develop that professional passion. The rewards of this professional activity are improved student learning and personal engagement and growth. Through the posing of important questions, the collection and analysis of classroom and school-based data, the articulation and presentation of results, the sharing of those results and the posing of new, important questions, teachers and administrators take control of their own job satisfaction. They can support their classroom practices and they improve classroom learning.

It is with a great deal of pride that I congratulate the professionals of Grand Erie who have contributed to this collection. I congratulate them for their writing, for the influence that they have had on education, and on their achievement of the highest professional status. Their passion makes a difference!" (p. 3)

## Evidence of my dialogic way of being over time

If I review my writing during the years of my doctoral research and even earlier, there is abundant evidence that dialogue is an inherent part of my ontology and methodology. In retrospect, it is amusing to read ("...and Jackie would interrupt...") what I wrote with Ron Wideman (Delong & Wideman, 1997) about our preference for collaborative writing and dealing with my dialogic way of being:

"...As one person articulates a thought or perspective the other builds on it or connects it to different thoughts and perspectives. The dialogue results in a creation greater than one could be alone.

As we edited transcripts, we found that Jackie tended to conceptualize holistically and Ron tended to conceptualize sequentially. Ron would focus on editing and Jackie would interrupt with thoughts about action research an article triggered, including those about inter-relationships among articles. Our cross-purposes frustrated us both. We found that writing down Jackie's comments preserved them for later consideration and gave Ron permission to also engage in this kind of thinking while we both continued in the editing process." (p. 106)

At first, I associated that characteristic solely with my being extroverted but as I read Belenky *et al.* (1986), Tannen (1990) and Gilligan (1982), I began to see that it is also associated with my gender. Not only is the dialogue part of my learning, it is also part of my need for intimacy and relationship as articulated in this aforementioned feminist literature. Gilligan (1982) traced the development of a morality which combined care and



responsibility, which she saw as dominated by women as opposed to a morality of rights more commonly practised by men (p. 171). Belenky *et al.* (1986) make a distinction between real talk and “didactic talk in which the speaker's intention is to hold forth rather than to share ideas” (p. 144). What constructivists call “real talk”, Jurgen Habermas (1982), called a kind of ideal speech situation:

“Speech that simultaneously taps and touches our inner and outer worlds within a community of others with whom we share deeply felt, largely inarticulate, but daily renewed inter-subjective reality” (p. 620 in Belenky, 1986, p. 146).

In the abstract for my doctoral thesis (DeLong, 2002), I wrote about, “valuing the other in my professional practice, building a culture of inquiry, reflection and scholarship and creating knowledge.” So, I am and have been devoted to building relationships and encouraging and supporting others in cultures of inquiry as evidenced in my thesis: “How Can I Improve My Practice As A Superintendent Of Schools And Create My Own Living Educational Theory?”

In the thesis, dialogue as research is pervasive, and it was my way of writing to insert the visual on the page first and that would cause me to write as internal dialogue as well as external; and all of this is conveyed through visuals (photos at the time), and transcription of dialogue with principals in my family of schools and emails. In Chapter Two of my thesis, I share an email that I sent to Greg, one of the principals in my family of schools, in response to his description of my influence on him that conveys the prime importance to me of non-hierarchical, caring relationships: in my response to, “what have I learned from you, Greg?” I write, “You inspire me with your tremendous capacity to make people feel valued (DeLong, e-mail 11/11/98)”. (DeLong, 2002, pp. 75–76)

In Chapter Four of my thesis, I explain my dialogic way of being and how my work as a school district Superintendent improved when the environment changed to respect my need for dialogue:

“It was a seminal event in my life when I recognized that the difference between the way my thinking and learning worked and Peter Moffatt’s. I can't put a specific time on it but I do remember a conversation in his office early in my tenure as superintendent. I think we were discussing our profiles on the Myers-Briggs Inventory, a scale that measured our leadership styles. I remember saying to him that what was preventing me from being as effective as I might on Executive Council was that everyone was an introvert except me; I am an extrovert. I meant that all of the others processed information internally and individually and I processed information through thinking out loud and in dialogue. The others would come to the meetings with fully analyzed, fully completed reports and expect my support without any discussion. ...By my articulating my dialogic learning style, Peter has become more responsive to my needs.” (*ibid.* p. 250)

Although Bakhtin does not discuss ontology at length, his understanding of dialogue resonates with my ontology: “To be means to communicate dialogically.” (*PDP*, 252):

“Thus, *to be is to be in dialogue*. Since it is primarily persons who are involved in dialogue (for *things* cannot communicate dialogically, they simply cannot talk), being is always personal. Since there are at least two persons involved in dialogue, being always presupposes plurality:



it is personal being shared with others. Since dialogue implies an event, being must happen, not accidentally, but always anew in dialogical communication. Being “is the *deepest communion* [communication, *obschenie*]. To *be* means to *communicate*” (PDP, 287; cf. 186–187). Therefore, being is always and only in the dialogical event of co-being.” (Nikulin, 1998, p. 396)

I appreciate the encouragement of Stephen Bigger (2020), one of the reviewers of this article, to engage critically with Dialogic Self Theory in a note through the EJOLTs open review process and I particularly like the concept of “The self, ‘I’ is part of a social chain, working together for the common good.” He writes:

“Thus our ‘self’ is viewed as a community in dialogue, maybe a peaceful discussion, maybe a cacophony. I am taking some points from Hermans and Gieser’s *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory* (2012). DST is described as a bridging theory, bringing together a range of other insights and disciplines, “theories, research traditions and practices” (2012:1). In this period promoting the rights and ambitions of the individual, relational and dialogical agendas place the individual in community. The self, ‘I’ is part of a social chain, working together for the common good. The whole is “a dynamic multiplicity of I positions” as the ‘I’ makes social connections.”

Bigger also makes the Dialogic Self Theory connection to teaching and learning and my need for relationship and discussion with teachers and students as co-learners when he writes:

“Teacher monologue can come as talk, worksheet or textbook. Dialogic pedagogy has high regard for relationship and discussion, with an emphasis on teachers and their students being co-learners.” (<https://ejolts.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=244>)

My main interest in Living Educational Theory research is how the responses are connected to generating valid explanations of educational influence in one’s own learning and in the learning of others and perhaps in the learning of social formations. While Dialogic Self Theory appears to be connected to psychotherapy, which is outside my field of knowledge, I agree with that sense:

“... that leaders need to be relational, encouraging dialogue and able to respond to unexpected circumstances. The same is true of all personal relationships.” (Bigger, 2020)

What I have always done has gone further in enabling individuals to generate their valid explanations of their educational influence in their own learning and in the learning of others. In order to influence the others educationally, I need to have the ontological security, focused on my own capacity to assist and support people generating their own living-educational-theories. I understand what I am doing makes a clear distinction between Dialogic Self Theory and what I am doing in terms of dialogue as research in helping to generate living-educational-theories.

In my work more recently, as I mentor practitioner-researchers around the globe to create their own living-educational-theories in cultures of inquiry, I am expressing my passion to make the world a better place, a better way of being. I have the advantage of not being grounded in institutions, so I am able to mentor others, love them into learning

(Campbell, 2011) and take the “slow approach” to action research as Máirín Glenn (2020) says:

“Engaging in a slow approach to action research allows researchers to reflect on their identity, their values as well as their ontological and epistemological commitments- factors of the utmost importance in research in practice.”

In the living-poster (image 2), I express my intentions to improve my practice as a mentor and as a global citizen (Potts, 2019) and answer my question, ‘How am I contributing to the Living Educational Theory research social movement by creating cultures of inquiry for mentoring practitioner-researchers to create their own living-educational -theories?’ :



**Image 2:** My 2020 living-poster (Delong, 2020e)

As I worked through the creation of my living-poster, I found it to be a completely different experience from the first one I created in 2019. See <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/jackied0619.pdf>. The first living-poster was a compendium of my research and writing up to that point, with boundaries constructed primarily through my work as a Superintendent and Adjunct Professor at Brock University. When I was working as a superintendent, my focus was very much on the professional development of the staff I was responsible for, their influence in enhancing the learning of the students as well as getting financial support in the budgets. That defined the boundaries as I brought people together, getting them connected, for example, with the Brock Master’s cohort. What I think I have done since then, which comes out in this living-poster, is to extend the sense of my boundaries. So, whereas the boundaries were provided by being a superintendent of schools, I am now responding much more as a global citizen connecting for example with Michelle Vaughan at Florida Atlantic University, Parbati Dhungana in Nepal at Katmandu University and Cathy Yuill in Durban, South Africa. I am still using my values and insights but the boundaries within which I am working have extended into this global context.

My interest is in mentoring, providing support and encouragement and ‘loving them into learning’ for Michelle, Parbati, and Cathy. Now I am working to connect these researchers and their conversations together. My latest living-poster was posted on the June 27, 2020 Living Educational Theory Research Gathering website, where people could then connect with me in this global response to the work of others as I spread the influence of Living Educational Theory research. The 1<sup>st</sup> International Living Educational Theory research conference clearly answers one of my questions:

“Have I shown how raising the voices of Living Educational Theory researchers in the contexts of Canada, Nepal, USA, and South Africa have contributed to the extending global influences of Living Educational Theory research with values of human flourishing in educational conversations?”

For information on this virtual conference, see

<http://www.spanglefish.com/livingtheoryresearchgathering/index.asp>.

In a Skype conversation on April 1, 2020, Parbati shared the process of creating her own living-educational-theory with my mentoring. She said that she always felt that she could ask any question, show her vulnerability and felt supported and free to take her own direction. She said that she felt that my mentoring built her confidence. When I asked if she ever felt colonized, she said that she never felt pressured to go in any direction she did not want to go. Furthermore, Parbati shared that she is basing her support of other students at the university on my model of creating a culture of inquiry and plans to teach that way when she finishes her studies.

My dialogical way of being is very evident on Sunday mornings, when our post-doctoral community meets on Skype and we share an update of what is happening in our research worlds and in our personal lives: what is working and what is presenting us with problems. Just listening and consoling are valued, but so are strategies for moving on. Very frequently, we find solutions to the problems presented, or at the least, provide directions to be considered. I look forward to those conversations every Sunday morning, even though, for me, it takes place at 8:30 a.m. Because of my dialogic way of being, these meetings allow me to share my thinking, provide me with constructive criticism to improve my research and writing, and give me new ideas to ponder. You hear everyone saying, “how can I help?” Here is a visual of the session on November 29, 2020:



**Image 3.** November 29, 2020, Postdoc session

### **Visual data as evidence of dialogue as research / Alternative ways of knowing and representing**

In this section, I share how I have used visual data primarily from video-recordings to provide evidence of dialogue as research in alternative ways of knowing and representing. Marshall (1999) describes the significance of images:

“Images, phrases, concepts and questions around which I organise my sense of inquiring can arise from a variety of sources, but when they ‘appear’ they can have an intensity which makes me recognise them as powerful, or invest them with such power. They have an evocative quality for me, repeatedly catch my attention, and/or are rich phrases (often with ambiguous or multiple meanings) which echo in different areas of my life. They serve as

organizing frames for my self-reflection and for taking issues further conceptually and in practice. Typically, they have been repeated in more than one setting. Sometimes I will be encouraged because they have resonance for other people as well as me, but sometimes this is unimportant.” (p. 4)

As I became more competent in the use of video-recordings for generating data and data analysis, the dialogue in them played a significant role in my research and writing and, in fact, I would be challenged to continue this work without them. In order to encourage the use of video-recordings and the value of video-data as evidence of our claims to know, to have improved our practice, I needed to show myself using it. I draw the following example from my EJOLTs article (DeLong, 2013):

“During the course of my thesis I unveiled what I thought was a prerequisite space, a Culture of Inquiry, for educators to influence themselves, others and social formations. This Culture of Inquiry space is an environment for giving voice to teachers. I frequently exhort them not to allow others to speak for them, to represent their embodied knowledge for and by themselves. I invite them into a Culture of Inquiry, a culture of love and support and encouragement, to unveil their embodied knowledge and create their own living-educational-theories. The passion that I feel for encouraging teachers to create knowledge can be seen in the following video-clip.



**Video 1:** Empathetic resonance (<http://youtu.be/gqECy86hzxA>) (DeLong, 2020a)

In the 3:11 minute video-clip, I am contributing to an international panel at an International Conference of Teacher Research. I am responding to a question about my support for teacher-research in the Grand Erie District School Board in Ontario. The process of empathetic resonance involves moving the cursor along the clip and responding to moments in which the viewer experiences the greatest flow of energy from the speaker. For example, as the cursor is moved backwards and forwards around the moment at 2:49 minutes, I am talking about the “SWAT” team arriving to support a teacher in her research. Both Jack and I claim that the video above (at 2:49 minutes) shows me expressing my life-affirming energy and valuing of an embodied expression of a culture-of-inquiry, in which several individuals are responding to the needs of another. The expression of my life-affirming energy at 2:49 minutes was evoked through my response to a question about the support I am giving for teacher-research. The responses of others appear attracted into an inclusive space with me and they experience a pooling of a flow of their own life-affirming energies. If we try to communicate the experience of my presencing this flow of life-affirming energy with the words, “flow of life-affirming energy” without the visual data, we (Jackie, Jack, Liz and Cathy) are claiming that something vital about the meaning is lost.” (pp. 29–30)

I find that visual data not only brings life to the writing but also deepens my understanding of educational relationships and living according to my values. The visual narrative is, at the same time raw data, and an explanation of empathetic resonance (DeLong, 2010) and life-affirming energy. This means that, in the moment of conversation

and while reviewing the video, I am mindful of the dynamics of our interactions, including the times when my ideas are resonating and there is a building of excitement in the educational conversation as new knowledge is created and I recognize our shared values. However, I am also aware of the tensions – the times when my meaning is not resonating with others or when I feel I am not clear or not understanding or being understood and I am a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989). In these cases, more dialogue and/or reflection is needed to uncover the source of the tension.

While recording, selecting clips and transcribing video data is time-consuming, I find such love, hope and joy (Campbell’s – *passim* – values that I share) in experiencing again the empathetic resonance in the conversations. I also find that there is a plethora of raw data that requires editing and, in that process, I experience the art of finding themes, concepts and revelations in my inquiry to improve my practice.

The students in my Master’s cohorts, while reluctant at first to turn the video camera on themselves, found the benefit of seeing themselves in action to discover whether they were in fact improving their practice and in turn, their students did the same. Here, I draw from “Introduction to living theory action research in a culture of inquiry transforms learning in elementary, high school and post-graduate settings” (Campbell, DeLong, Griffin & Whitehead, 2013, p. 8) for the first example from Liz Campbell:

“When we are analyzing video and looking for explanations of our educational influence, we use two techniques for showing the significance of a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries (Rayner, 2011): first we scan through the video data looking for moments of empathetic resonance in which we feel most strongly that we recognise the energy-flowing values of the other, the activity of the participants is increased, or there is evidence of tension; second, we write visual narratives to explain our interpretation of the empathetic resonance.

The visual narrative is at the same time raw data and an explanation of the empathetic resonance. This means that in the moment of conversation and while reviewing the video, we are mindful of the dynamics of our interactions, including the times when our ideas are resonating and there is a building of excitement between us as new knowledge is created and we recognize our shared values. But we are also aware of the tensions, the times when our meaning is not resonating with the others or when we feel there is something unclear, missing or not fully explained. In these cases, more dialogue or reflection is needed to uncover the source of the tension.

To frame her research process for the reader, Liz videotaped the evolution of the Living Theory Action Research Process. Liz Campbell can be seen to be engaging in the action research process, as we understand it from Whitehead and McNiff, in the following clip and her explanation of methodology emerging from expressing her energy-flowing values such as “Being Loved into Learning” (Video 2).”



**Video 2:** See 54 seconds into the 18:44 minute video of Liz Campbell for an expression of being loved into learning (<https://youtu.be/zmBcrUsDG8s>) (Delong, 2020b)

The second example of video-recording is Cathy Griffin's (2012) use of video where her students shared their action research questions for improving their learning:

"In the following video, four of my students read their personal research questions. Since creating their questions, I have sorted students into research groups based on the themes of their inquiries. The themes include focus, group work, independence in learning, interacting with others and conflict management and fear of talking in front of the class. Rather than getting ideas from books, we worked individually and in groups to develop action plans based on what the students already knew. You will hear each student explain the barriers they experienced and action they are taking."



**Video 3:** The Living Curriculum: Student Action Research Projects (<http://youtu.be/rz2sSUEZlno>)" (Griffin, 2013, p. 72) (Delong, 2020c)

Through the visual data, I am highlighting the methodological importance of my dialogic way of being, and through my "loving educational conversations" (Vaughan & Delong, 2019, p. 79) and dialogues I am clarifying the ontological values which are the standards of judgment that I use as explanatory principles in my educational relationships with my colleagues, Cathy Griffin, Liz Campbell, Michelle Vaughan Cathy Yuill, and Parbati Dhungana. These five live in totally different contexts, are very different individuals, and yet each one is generating or has generated her own living-educational-theory accounts with deep insights and with the support of our loving educational conversations.

These loving educational conversations are endemic to the living cultures of inquiry that I create so that the mentees feel safe and comfortable to be vulnerable in communicating their values and living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989). As Vaughan and I explain (2019), it is important to note that cultures of inquiry can be both on the micro and macro level and in small and large groups. When we hear the term 'cultures of inquiry', it may conjure up images of groups sitting together with the purpose of using dialogue to explore various inquiry questions; and, while this may be an accurate representation of



some of the ways in which cultures of inquiry are formed, they can also be as small as two people involved in a mentoring relationship, where, as Yamamoto (1988) discusses, both parties benefit from the paradox of mentorship through the fulfillment of their roles:

“There are, to begin with, not many masters in any given field of human endeavor. Of these, only a fraction would qualify as mentors worthy of the name, that is, as individuals of virtuosity, vision, and wisdom... And, finally, mentors ought to see the world they themselves can only dream of through their faith and trust in the guided.” (p. 187)

When both members of the mentoring relationship are valued and ‘seen’ for their equal contribution to the relationship, symbiosis occurs and both members reap the reward of the relationship. As Yamamoto (1988) describes, it is the recognition of the other individual, the experience of being seen that has an impact far beyond what the message or advice may be:

“What is sought is not praise, reward, or pity, all of which are an accounting for past deeds. Rather, it is regard-an acknowledgment of one's personhood as well as trust in what is and is to come-that is desired...If that is the case, the recognition and affirmation by a mentor may be expected to have a profound influence on the chosen few.” (p. 184)

In this video clip, Michelle says that she imagines me “like a fairy godmother with all these lives that you are touching.” Here is my reaction! If you put your cursor on the red line of the clip and just move it back and forth, I think you can see the life- affirming energy in both of us in the process called, “empathetic resonance” (Delong *et al.*, 2013, p. 79)



**Video 4:** Empathetic Resonance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z00ZE1C74II>  
(Delong, 2020d)

Michelle sees it as a kind of “ripple mentorship” in which:

“... a little bit of loving kindness here, a little bit of loving kindness here and that ripple effect. And I think about the lives and the students that I’ve touched and then they’re going into classrooms validating their students. And it’s exciting work because it feels so true.” (Vaughan & Delong, 2019)

## Obstacles and constraints in dialogue as research method

While I do not intend to cover this topic comprehensively, I will address some of the issues that can constrain us: critical feedback, and gender and cultural differences.

One of the barriers in supporting practitioner-researchers is the struggle to give critical feedback that is received as helpful, acceptable and not personal. When I am guiding



the individuals, I say that I want the students to become aware of who they are and want to be, and support their development as best I can. Offering critique that might be valuable can be challenging. The intended message is not necessarily the one received by the student. This is even more challenging when the mentoring is written and given by e-mail than when it is delivered face-to-face. In order to try to establish a dialogue, I encourage the students to reply to the advice so that I might learn about the effect my message has on them. Marie Huxtable (2020) says that it is a fairly common problem:

“On the one hand there is resistance to introducing what might be construed as a note of discord into intellectual discourse, on the other hand no progress is made without it.”

Another critical component of critical feedback is the dimension of cultural differences. The work of de Sousa Santos (2014) is seminal to the issue of cultural differences; he sees “intercultural translation” as a means for addressing “underlying assumptions” (p.212) “Intercultural translation” is Santos’ alternative both to the abstract universalism that grounds Western-centric general theories and to the idea of incommensurability between cultures. He sees the two as related and accounting for destruction and assimilation of non-Western cultures by Western modernity. Whitehead (2016) writes:

“For Santos intercultural translation consists of searching for isomorphic (similar form or structure) concerns and underlying assumptions among cultures. It includes identifying differences and similarities, and developing, whenever appropriate, new hybrid forms of cultural understanding and intercommunication. These new hybrid forms ... may be useful in favouring interactions and strengthening alliances among social movements fighting, in different cultural contexts, against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy and for social justice, human dignity, or human decency.” (p. 91)

In a Skype dialogue with Parbati Dhungana, I asked her outright if she sensed any hierarchy in our relationship or if my “guiding practice” (Gjotterud, 2009) was gentle and helpful. She said that she had never found my influence to be controlling or colonizing and she felt the way that I love her into learning actively influences the way I work with her. She does say, however, that gender issues are prevalent in the patriarchal society of Nepal.

Her earlier research, Master’s (Dhungana, 2007) and M. Phil. (Dhungana, 2013), was concerned with gender inequality and female subordination in literature and in society. In her *Educational Journal of Living Theories* article (Dhungana, 2020), she describes and explains her educational influence in own learning and in the learning of others as she explores her value of “living love” as her explanatory principle for improving her practice and creating her own living-educational-theory.

I have observed that female students will often receive criticism differently. In one incident, Dhungana’s supervisor made some suggestions for readings and she felt that he was criticizing her work. After we talked about it, she realized that he was just trying to help and enjoyed reading the literature recommended. Shakeshaft (1995), is concerned with an androcentric nature, which she defines as “the practice of viewing the world and shaping reality through a male lens” (p. 140); and her earlier research (1987) indicated that:

1. Relationships with others are more central to all actions for women than they are for male administrators.
2. Teaching and learning is more often the major focus for women than it is for male administrators
3. Building community is more often an essential part of the women administrator's style than it is for the man (Donmoyer *et al.*, 1995, p. 146).

As opposed to valuing being single-focused, Bateson (1989) feels that multi-tasking, a dynamic of moving amongst the multiple intelligences, (Gardner, 1983) is a capacity that is very natural for women:

“But what if we were to recognize the capacity for distraction, the divided will, as representing a higher wisdom? Perhaps Kierkegaard was wrong when he said that 'purity is to will one thing'. Perhaps the issue is not a fixed knowledge of the good, the single focus that millenia of monotheism have made us idealize, but a kind of attention that is open, not focused on a single point. Instead of concentration on a transcendent ideal, sustained attention to diversity and interdependence may offer a different clarity of vision, one that is sensitive to ecological complexity, to the multiple rather than the singular. Perhaps we can discern in women honoring multiple commitments a new level of productivity and new possibilities of learning” (Bateson 1989, p. 166).

## Going forward/Next steps

In this article, I have shared evidence of my dialogic nature and made an argument for dialogue as research method, a method that aligns with my epistemology, ontology and methodology. I would definitely appreciate critical responses to the article in order to strengthen it. Bell hooks (1994) describes dialogue as being one of the simplest ways to cross boundaries and barriers:

“In both cases there seemed to be much more public representation of the divisions between these groups than description or highlighting of those powerful moments when boundaries are crossed, differences confronted, discussion happens, and solidarity emerges. We needed concrete counter-examples that would disrupt the seemingly fixed (yet often unstated) assumptions that it was really unlikely such individuals could meet across boundaries. Without these counter-examples I felt we were all in danger of losing contact, of creating conditions that would make contact impossible. Hence, I formed my conviction that public dialogues could serve as useful interventions.” (p. 130)

I have argued that it seems evident that our understanding of the qualities of life-affirming energy and energy-flowing values are limited by expression through text alone. How do we know that we are living and experiencing these qualities as we create our own living-educational-theories? We know because we can see and experience them with others in the analysis of visual data. In fact, I would be unable to explain how my values serve as explanatory principles in my life and my educational influence, without the recordings of the dialogue between me, the mentees and my colleagues.

I will continue to contribute as a global citizen (Potts, 2019) to a Living Educational Theory research as a social movement and to human flourishing as I mentor practitioner-researchers around the world. Living Educational Theory research as a social movement was evident in the Living Educational Theory Research Meeting on June 27, 2020. The keynote

addresses and the small-group conversations of the 70 researchers in attendance were full of the excitement of contributing to improving our world, especially in this time of the COVID pandemic. As Bohm (1996) points out:

“And perhaps in dialogue, when we have this very high energy of coherence, it might bring us beyond just being a group that could solve social problems. Possibly it could make a new change in the individual and a change in the relation to the cosmic.” (p. 18)

While the confinement of the Coronavirus pandemic during the time of writing may be constraining, it can also be seen as an opportunity to live according to my values more fully, to support others through the technology and social media, and to become more proficient in virtual teaching and learning. Dialogue as research method seems perfectly suited to learning/researching in the current pandemic, as we meet almost entirely virtually using Skype, Zoom and FaceTime; moving our thinking on depends on the dialogue, its recordings and analyses.

Currently, my next international conference, also virtual, will be with AERA on April 9–12, 2021. Along with my international colleagues, Shivani Mishra from India, Parbati Dhungana from Nepal, Jack Whitehead from the UK, and Michelle Vaughan from the USA, I will be contributing to the following symposium:

“Accepting Educational Responsibility: Building Living Theory Cultures of Educational Inquiry in global contexts.

Session abstract

The contributors are all exploring the implications for improving their educational practices and contributing to educational knowledge of accepting educational responsibility in building Living Educational Theory cultures of inquiry in their local and global contexts. They are participating in a global social movement of educational researchers that is engaged in asking, researching and answering, ‘How do I, individually and in cooperation with others, enhance the difference Living Educational Theory research can make in a community concerned with extending human flourishing?’ Each researcher is moved by unique constellations of values that are used to explain their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence their practices and understandings.”

In addition, Jack Whitehead and I are writing a book about Living Educational Theory research that we hope will be helpful to practitioner-researchers and tutors around the world who are committed to creating their own living-educational-theories as part of this social movement.

To conclude, I leave you with some powerful thoughts from MacInnis and Portelli (2002):

“Perhaps, and finally, if there is a lesson to be learned here, it is that we as professionals in our field need to spend more time listening closely to what our colleagues are saying, not dismissing them because they threaten our domain, or because we are reluctant to let go of a comfortable way of thinking. And we should realize, as Paulo Friere so prophetically said, that when trust, love and humility are present, perhaps the whole is greater than its parts. And that dialogue, with its constructive and co-operative approach, shows new promise in

creating the opportunity for practical feedback and for growth in our research endeavours and professional practice.” (p. 43)

I have stressed my dialogical way of being in explaining my educational influences in learning, the importance of ‘being loved into learning’ in my educational relationships, and the creation of cultures of inquiry for the creation of my own and others’ living-educational-theories. I hope that I have raised the voices of others using dialogue as research method as I have helped practitioner-researchers create valid accounts of their living-educational-theories in cultures of inquiry.

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