



Volume 15(2): i-vii
www.ejolts.net
ISSN 2009-1788

Editorial Foreword

Peter Mellett, Jack Whitehead, Moira Laidlaw & Marie Huxtable.

Peter Mellett

*Community-based
Researcher, UK.*

Jack Whitehead

*University of Cumbria, UK.
ORCID iD 0000-0002-9644-
078*

Moira Laidlaw

*Open University, UK.
ORCID iD 0000-0002-5614-
8077*

Marie Huxtable

*University of Cumbria, UK.
ORCID iD 0000-0003-1808-
0670*

CC BY-NC

Copyright: © 2021 Mellett;
Whitehead; Laidlaw; Huxtable.

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

This issue heralds the change of EJOLTs from publishing papers gathered twice a year to publishing papers as soon as they are accepted and prepared for publication by the Editorial Board.

The journal was established in 2008. Although published solely as a web-based journal the tradition of paper-published journals was followed, that is papers were gathered to publish in an issue at predetermined times of the year. Since then technology and its use has been developed to enable practitioners to better realise their professional responsibilities. These include researching into their practice to understand and improve it and creating valid accounts of their educational influences in learning, and to contribute the educational knowledge they generate in the process to the growth of a global educational knowledge base that everyone can benefit from. Knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research and EJOLTs procedures have also developed since 2008.

The paper by Kennedy, which is included in this issue, exemplifies the result of some of the key developments that have evolved since 2008. Changing to publishing papers 'as and when' ready will enable us to use what we have learned to best effect. The key developments we are focussed on here are those which have emerged from our cooperative learning to improve our knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research and contribute to the development of EJOLTs publishing criteria and procedures for producing content which are fit for purpose, that is to enable EJOLTs to realise its values-laden *raison d'être*.

The first issue of the journal included Whitehead's paper, 'Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories (Whitehead, 2008). Whitehead (the progenitor of Living Educational Theory Research) summarised his best thinking at the time with regard to what constitutes a living-educational-theory, its creation, processes of validation and implications for individuals and communities learning to flourish and helping others to do so too, and contributing to Humanity learning to flourish.

Since 2008 Living Educational Theory Research has become even better established internationally as a distinct paradigm and methodology. The research methods employed have extended and new ones have been developed. Numerous accounts of Living Educational Theory Research, undertaken in diverse contexts and fields of practice have been published in various peer-reviewed journals. These are now contributing to the growth of a global educational knowledge base.

Kennedy's paper exemplifies the advances made in Living Educational Theory Research over time. It illustrates the implications of developing knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research for individuals and communities, as they learn to flourish, ultimately contributing to Humanity learning to flourish as an integral part of a complex and diverse world.

Kennedy's account is striking in its honesty and clear-sightedness, which she uses to identify, plan, execute and reflect on her research enquiry. Kennedy was a primary school teacher in Ireland when she began her research. It was focussed by her desire to help her students to recognise and manage their anxiety in order to improve their quality of life and ability to benefit fully from their school experiences. The wider context identified by Kennedy, in the literature, is that anxiety disorders are one of the top contributors to the global burden of disease for young people.

Kennedy's research began with enquiry (exploring questions) when a growing number of parents sought strategies to support their children who were expressing low levels of anxiety at home (p. 2). The research question emerged as: 'How can I, as a primary school teacher, improve my practice to support children with anxiety recognition and management strategies?' (p. 5). Kennedy gives a clear account of her living-educational-theory methodology. She follows a familiar Living Educational Theory Research pathway (pp. 2, 3, 4), communicating clearly the meanings of her embodied values (social justice, empowerment, hope and positivity). These are used to explain her educational practice and to evaluate the educational influences in the learning of her students that changing her practice is having. Kennedy gives full descriptions and valid explanations of her educational influence in her own learning to improve her educational practice, the learning of her students and others. She also outlines the safeguarding stratagems incorporated into the research methodology (p. 7), drawing on international, national (Irish) and local requirements in order to meet ethical issues that might emerge during the enquiry. She illustrates the mixed methods approach she adopts, which included reflective journaling, observation, note-taking and interviews (pp. 5, 9, 11, 19).

Since 2008 the EJOLTs publishing criteria have been made public on <https://ejolts.net/submission>. They include a statement of the importance of papers including a researcher's descriptions and valid explanations of their educational influence in

the learning of others to improve their educational practice. Kennedy's account illustrates the implications for professional practitioners. She presents clear evidence to support her claims of improvement in educational practice and that they have enhanced the learning of the children. They have been systematically tested for validity by triangulating children's data with parents' and class teachers' reflective journals (pp. 12, 13, 20). This account notably integrates a number of links that lead to video, audio and pictorial files. These have been selected to help her communicate the embodied meanings of her values and as evidence to support her claims.

Kennedy claims that she developed a way of supporting children, as well as their parents and class teachers, to recognise and manage anxiety, that allowed her to collaborate with them in a world characterised by a negotiated view of reality (p. 10). Her approach was consistent with the realisation of her values of empowerment, social justice, voice and action through her practice. Kennedy shows in her paper how her support, in a spirit of "collaborative reciprocity in learning" (pp. 8, 23), evolved that included students, their parents and their class teachers. Strategies were shared with other class teachers so that they became aware of strategies being used to engage with their students, in an 'emotionally literate' manner, so that they too could integrate such strategies into their teaching, if they proved to be effective.

The final section of the paper shows Kennedy realising her responsibility as a professional to contribute to the learning of those beyond her immediate community to flourish and helping others learning to do so too, and in so doing contributes to the learning of Humanity to flourish in and of a complex diverse world.

Kennedy's living-educational-theory methodology is clearly stated and underpins the structure of the account. Her embodied meanings of social justice, empowerment, hope and positivity as values are communicated clearly. These values form the standards by which she evaluates improvement in what she is doing. They also form the explanatory principles in the valid explanation of her educational influences in learning (that is her living-educational-theory). Each claim is systematically validated, including that of her educational influence in the learning of social formations to improve its educational practice.

A concluding section 'Inspiration Beyond the Classroom' details the presentation 'Teacher as a Change Agent' given to student-teachers at the Froebel Department in Maynooth University. She subsequently received an invitation to present at a Wellbeing Conference (p.22) and at an international conference; the CARN (Collaborative Action Research Network) 2021 conference, and provides evidence of her contributing to the growth of global knowledge.

'Relatability' is an issue that has been attended to during recent years, particularly with respect to clarifying EJOLTs publishing criteria. Whitehead summarised the issue in his 2019 paper, 'Creating a living-educational-theory from questions of the kind, 'how do I improve my practice?' 30 years on with Living Theory research' (Whitehead, 2019, p.12) in answer to his question, 'How can we move from the individual to the universal? – a question of generalisability', he writes:

Many traditional theories explain behaviour and events in terms of general, linguistic concepts that apply to all the behaviours and events that are subsumed by the theory. This kind of theory has generalisability in that it applies to all. In 1989 a common criticism of a

living-educational-theory, as an explanation of an individual's educational influence in learning, was that it was anecdotal, subjective and could not be generalised in the sense of applying to all. To meet this criticism, I pointed out that what I later referred to as Living Theory research was, in Bassey's (2001) terms, *relatable*, rather than *generalisable*. In promoting the value of *relatability* Bassey argues that the merit of a study of singularities lies in the extent to which individuals can relate the study to their practice. I use the idea of *relatability* of a living-educational-theory to refer to its connection to others, not from within a general linguistic concept of 'all'. In Living Theory research, *relatability* refers to other individuals who are generating their own living-educational-theories, using their unique constellation of values as explanatory principles and who are drawing insights from traditional theories.

The research detailed in Kennedy's paper has clearly had an educational effect on the learning of the author. It has also acted as an educational influence in the learning of the children and the parents involved and also of teacher colleagues. Validated evidence for these claims is contained within the structure of the paper. Within a broader setting, the research and its outcomes have been disseminated through presentations and seminars and so might claim to have had an educational influence on social formations. Readers of this paper via EJOLTs might incorporate insights from it into their own educational research in order to improve the quality of their practice.

From the researcher's 'point of view', the aim of their research is to analyse a situation in order to understand it better and improve it and then to disseminate this new understanding for others to share as they seek to improve the quality of their own practice. From the practitioner's perspective, the aim of the research is to make use of fresh insights in effecting changes within their own context. However, while valid claims of educational influence taking place *during* the research may be confidently made, claims for educational influence *post hoc* through reports of the research are more difficult to substantiate. Put simply, what use might this paper be to other practitioner-researchers trying to enhance their educational, values-laden, influences in the learning of people and social formations to flourish and helping others to do so too? This question emerged in an Editorial Foreword to an edition of this journal, when considering the practical reality of the contextualised content and exposition of living-educational-theory papers.

... I feel that we are each still left to absorb what is in those papers – almost by a process of osmosis – to reinforce, amend and generally strengthen our understanding as living-educational-theory researchers and then, by some undefined process, bring about 'transformation'. (Mellett, 2017, p. ii)

The "undefined process" within Living Educational Theory Research that enables us to "bring about transformation" was later identified by the term 'Relatability', outlined as follows in a subsequent Editorial Foreword:

... we understand *relatability* through its inter-contextual form as developed by Michael Bassey (1981, 1999, 2001) rather than in its purely interpersonal form as commonly understood. ... The aim of qualitative research is to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes (as in quantitative research). ... Living Educational Theory researchers (as members of a qualitative research paradigm) are often

asked questions of the sort: Are your findings generalisable? What can your research contribute?

The aim of any researcher is to analyse a situation in order to understand it better and then to disseminate this new understanding for others to share and learn from. The aim of any reader of an account of that research is to seek fresh insights for effecting change within his or her own context. The concept of relatability allows the reader to ask the basic question: *'Is this research applicable / transferrable to my own situation?'* Relatability is offered as a criterion for generalisation to take place. (Laidlaw & Mellett, 2021, p. ii)

What is the relatability of Kennedy's paper? To what extent may a practitioner reading this paper relate it to her/his own teaching? It is not possible to judge without knowing the contexts of putative practitioner-researchers. The best that may be said, from within the context of writing this Editorial Foreword, is that the paper's narrative of its author's theory and practice provide a tool for critical thinking, as readers distil insights to re-assess their enquiries and develop their own living-educational-theories.

When assessing this paper, as a tool for critical thinking, our attention is directed to the processes involved in it rather than to the specific contexts and situations described. It follows – with passion and commitment – the classical repeated action-reflection cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect. The developmental path of this cycle through time is described and explained with a distinctive clarity that should enable an attentive reader to say "Ah ... that's what I'll do" – as they translate and adapt the author's processes to clarify their own successive action-reflection cycles that underpin the various stages of their own enquiry.

In conclusion, Kennedy's research began with a commitment to improving her educational practice, with the aim of enabling young people to manage their stress and anxiety. In this resulting account, she makes a clear and academically rigorous case for the view that such feelings lead to a depleted quality of life and the educational value of experience for the people in her classroom. She carries out a rigorous and reliable process of research and draws in the children's parents to help, finally coming to logical, robust and convincing conclusions about the value of her research and possible implications for wider contexts. She then details her work in other educational contexts in order to share her growing knowledge. The transparency of her writing lays clear the 'How' of her research process, which, we claim, is now available for others to use as a valuable 'relatable' resource as they create their own living-educational-research enquiries and accounts.

Another paper that offers a 'relatable' resource is Glenn's paper (Glenn, 2021), 'What Is the Educational Influence of my Engagement with EJOLTs (Educational Journal of Living Theories)?'. She details a researcher's developing insights into social justice issues, looking at what influences particular contexts, and how they can improve their educational practice within them to improve the quality of learning. In part they are also explicitly concerned with the nature and significance of relatability and its dimensional influence in Living Educational Theory Research and their own individual living-educational-theories.

So far we have focussed on what in Kennedy's paper exemplifies some key understandings that have emerged from our cooperative learning to improve our knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research and contribute to the development of EJOLTs publishing criteria. What is not clear yet, is that the process of Kennedy engaged in to create her paper exemplifies the development of EJOLTs

procedures for producing content which is fit for the values-laden purpose of EJOLTs. These procedures have emerged from the commitment of members of the Editorial Board to develop their cooperative democratic ways of creating EJOLTs together. To put briefly, the major visible change since 2008 has been the development of a three-stage review process comprising a double-blind review stage, an open review stage, and finally review by the Editorial Board deciding whether to publish. The 'double-blind review' stage will be familiar to practitioners submitting a paper to a journal or conference. What they may not be so familiar with is the EJOLTs 'open review' stage. It is an invitation to an online conversation in the 'Virtual Space of Cooperation' (<https://ejolts.org/>) with a peer-review team. The conversation is focussed by the publishing criteria guidance form, with the aim of enabling the researcher to strengthen their paper and work towards publication. When each reviewer advises that the paper meets all the publishing criteria the Editorial Board reviews the paper and decides whether to publish or advise the researcher that further work is needed.

The EJOLTs review procedure has been developed with a focus on enhancing it as an educational experience and opportunity for practitioners committed to realising their professional responsibilities for their educational, that is their values-laden, practice and contributing to the global growth of educational knowledge. Creating a paper which communicates to others is integral to the process of Living Educational Theory Research and the realisation of its educational potential. Kennedy embraced the educational opportunity working with peer-reviewers in the open review space offered her. She also embraced the educational opportunity the Editorial Board subsequently offered her to work with Moira Laidlaw, a member of the board, to deepen her knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research.

The resulting paper is a testament to Kennedy's commitment to realising her professional responsibilities as a practitioner, and a global citizen, for researching her values-laden practice. It is also a testament to the commitment of Moira Laidlaw who supported Kennedy over an extended period of time. Both product and process exemplifies the quality of the review procedures EJOLTs has developed as fit for its values-laden purpose.

Some papers progress through the review procedure within weeks, some months or even years, depending on the circumstances and focus of the practitioner-researcher. Moving from publishing collected papers twice a year to publishing as and when they are ready enables EJOLTs to focus on enhancing the quality and educational value of publishing accounts of Living Educational Theory Research for the individual and global community of professional practitioner educational researchers.

We hope Kennedy's paper and her experience of the EJOLTs review process inspires you to develop your Living Educational Theory Research and to submit your paper to EJOLTs in the near future.

References

Glenn, M. (2021). What Is the Educational Influence of my Engagement with Ejolts (Educational Journal of Living Theories)?' *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 14(1): 50-67. Access from <https://ejolts.net/node/373>

-
- Kennedy, A. (2022). How my Living Educational Theory Research is helping me to improve my practice as a primary school teacher, in supporting children to recognise and manage their anxiety. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 15(2), 1-29. Access from <https://ejolts.net/node/392>
- Laidlaw, M. & Mellett, P. (2021). Editorial Foreword, *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 14(1), i-xvi. Access from <https://ejolts.net/node/370>
- Mellett, P. (2017). What is the Educational Influence of the Educational Journal of Living Theories? Editorial Foreword, *Educational Journal of Living Theories* 10(1), i-ix. Access from <https://ejolts.net/node/295>
- Whitehead, J. (2008). Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 1(1), 103-126. Access from <https://ejolts.net/node/80>.