

# Ontological and epistemological ways of creating living-theories for social transformation: a form of educational activism

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## Abstract

In this paper, the argument that I am presenting is that while I cannot reform the world to make it a kinder, more loving place, through my sustained commitment, my 15% (Morgan, 1988), I can bring about systemic change in my circle of influence (Covey, 1989) in a form of hopeful and loving educational social activism. I explore the close relationship between the ontological and the epistemological in my life. My ontological values are clarified as explanatory principles that I use to give meaning and purpose to my life and these explanatory principles are epistemologically significant in providing the living standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of my contribution to educational knowledge. The explanations of influence include explanatory principles of being loved into learning (Campbell, 2011), setting the ego at the door (Vaughan, 2019), living culture of inquiry, and educational conversations and dialogue as research data. I explore the nature of my dialogic way of being that enables me to build educational relationships as I create knowledge. Explanations of my educational influences in learning from within my local site of practice extend into global educational conversations using digital visual technology. I see myself as a social activist, part of a Living Theory movement (Whitehead, 2009) for social transformation for the flourishing of humanity.

## Introduction

In this contribution to *Repoliticising P/AR: From Action Research to Activism*, I explore the close relationship in my life between the ontological and the epistemological. My ontological values are clarified as the explanatory principles that I use to give meaning and purpose to my life and these explanatory principles are epistemologically significant in providing the living standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of my contribution to educational knowledge. The explanations of influence include explanatory principles of being loved into learning (Campbell, 2011), setting the ego at the door, living culture of inquiry, and educational conversations and dialogue as research data. I provide explanations of my educational influences in learning from within my local site of practice and extend this influence into global educational conversations using digital, visual technology. I see myself as part of a Living Theory movement (Whitehead, 2009) for social transformation and for the flourishing of humanity.

When I try to explain my educational influences in learning, I am reminded of Said's reference to the work of Valéry:

No word comes easier or oftener to the critic's pen than the word influence, and no vaguer notion can be found among all the vague notions that compose the phantom armory of 18 aesthetics. Yet there is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another. (Said, 1997, p.15)

When I consider the nature of my influence, it is not a matter of my causing another's learning, but rather, of creating an educational relationship within which educational conversations and different kinds of learning occur through the participation of each party in the conversation as we are 'loved into learning'. As a practitioner-researcher, I am committed to the recognition and accreditation of the embodied knowledge of educators where their knowledge often meets what de Sousa Santos' (2014) calls "epistemicide". Epistemicide draws attention to the ways in which the validity of indigenous and practitioner-knowledge is not recognised or is killed off in the dominant epistemology of universities. In my work, I have demonstrated systemic influences through the development of living cultures of inquiry in District School Boards, in Masters Cohorts, in teacher research networks and with individuals for the creation of living-theories. (Whitehead, 1989)

In this article, I explore my educational relationships and probe into how it is that I encourage and support others so that they experience being "loved into learning" (Campbell, 2011). Just to be clear, by Living Theory I am meaning,

"...the distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include 'I' as a living contradiction, the use of action-reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence." (Whitehead, 2009, p. 182)

As I began to write this paper, I found that I was blocked. What was the problem? In this paper's proposal, I articulated writing about my passion for building educational relationships within a living culture of inquiry as I encouraged and supported practitioner-researchers to create their own living-theories. An educational conversation on SKYPE with Jack Whitehead unlocked the problem: the language of the proposal was divorced from real people. When Jack pointed that out to me, the door unlocked and I began looking for data to provide evidence of what Jerome Gumede and Peter Mellett (2019) call a "good-quality conversation." They see a 'good-quality conversation' as one that is undertaken with respect, and careful listening. Once I inserted visuals of the people whom I love, the writing came alive; this further supports the concept of educational conversations and dialogue as research data and aligns my methodology with my ontology and epistemology.

I find that visual data not only brings life to the writing but also deepens the understanding of educational relationships and learning. The visual narrative is, at the same time, raw data and an explanation of empathetic resonance 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. But, 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. In these cases, more dialogue and/or reflection is needed to uncover the source of the tension.

While I have been a teacher-mentor with Cathy Griffin, Liz Campbell and Michelle Vaughan, I hold an educational responsibility to express the special humanity of the educator "for whom the life and particular being of all his [her] students is the decisive factor to which his 'hierarchical recognition is subordinated'". (Buber, 1947, p. 122)

The argument that I am presenting is that while I cannot reform the world to make it a kinder, more loving place, through my sustained commitment, my 15% (Morgan, 1988), I can bring

about systemic change in my circle of influence (Covey, 1989) in a form of hopeful and loving educational social activism. I am working with Judy McBride to try to understand and incorporate the process of *métissage* (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009) in my thinking and I use some of the analogies in Part F. The paper is written in Six Parts:

1. Part A. Sustained commitment to building educational relationships
2. Part B. The relationship between my ontology and epistemology
3. Part C. Values of “setting my ego at the door” and being “loved into learning” as living standards of judgment
4. Part D. My sustained commitment to activism with other living theorists across the globe
5. Part E. My validation group
6. Part F. Pulling together the threads and the next braid

I begin with significance of my long-term educational relationships.

### **Part A. Sustained commitment to building educational relationships**

In this section, I review some of my historical context and focus on one particular relationship that I have sustained over 10 years with Liz Campbell (now Dr Liz). My writing over the last 25 years demonstrates my sustained commitment to building educational relationships as I encourage and support practitioner-researchers to create their own living-theories within a living culture of inquiry (DeLong, 2013). I am intentional about living my value of loving kindness and loving others into learning; and, I have both created and researched living cultures of inquiry where practitioner-researchers know 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 living-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 concept of ‘alongsideness’ (Pound, 2003). Robyn sees that:

Values of alongsideness act as explanatory principles and standards of practice and evaluation. As an epistemology, alongsideness employs Living Theory (Whitehead, 1989). Accessibility for participants unfamiliar with this research is increased by calling the developmental process ‘enquiring collaboratively’. (Pound, 2014, Abstract)

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

Experiencing values such as loving kindness and being loved into learning within this democratic, non-hierarchical environment, and, the recognition of their embodied knowledge enables individuals to improve their lives and practice by creating their own living-theories:

“...the distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include ‘I’ as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence.” (Whitehead, 2009, p. 182)

This explanation of this 'living culture of inquiry' has been modified from my article in the December 2013 issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories (DeLong, 2013, p. 26).

Beginning in 1996, when I had just finished writing part of the Ontario Common Curriculum, my colleague, Linda Grant, who had just met Jack Whitehead, suggested that we use Action Research to implement the curriculum in six school boards across Ontario with Ministry of Education funding – this is when the journey began. I learned the self-study action research process alongside the five teachers and other two administrators. While I was the Superintendent responsible for the schools from which the educators came, I was also responsible for the outcomes of the Action Research project as well as my own doctoral research. From those early days of taking on the faith-filled challenge of believing in the potential of self-study action research and the willingness to learn together, my commitment has been sustained for building educational relationships within a living culture of inquiry as I encourage and support practitioner-researchers to create their own living-theories.

Creating my own living-theory was transformative; I think I experienced what Tillich called a “transcending experience”:

Faith is not a theoretical affirmation of something uncertain, it is the existential acceptance of something transcending ordinary experience. Faith is not an opinion but a state. It is the state of being grasped by the power of being which transcends everything that is and in which everything that is participates. He who is grasped by this power is able to affirm himself because he knows that he is affirmed by the power of being-itself. In this point mystical experience and personal encounter are identical. In both of them faith is the basis of the courage to be. (Tillich, 1962, p,168)

When I review my writing since 1996 (DeLong, 2019a), it has focused upon researching and writing my own living theory within a living culture of inquiry, as well as, supporting and encouraging others to do the same. As I review the titles of the research papers such as “How have we, as practitioner-researchers, accounted for the quality of our educational influences with teacher researchers and in the education of social formations?” (DeLong, Black & Whitehead, 2003); and, “A pedagogy of loving into learning in living-cultures-of-inquiry”(DeLong, 2015); and, “Dialogical relationships in living cultures of inquiry for the creation of living-theories” (DeLong, 2019), the sustained commitment is evident. I note as well that many of my papers are co-authored, in particular with Jack Whitehead, as well as with Liz Campbell and Cathy Griffin.

When I was Superintendent in the School District, I created a culture of inquiry across the district and supported it with my facilitation of the Action Research groups across the system, supported by budget that allowed for teacher release time, facilitators, equipment such as cameras, publications of research, and, comfortable stages on which to action researchers could present their findings, such as conferences. Later, I co-created the Masters cohorts at Brock University with Susan Drake and Micheal Manley-Casimir so that the informal action researchers could have their knowledge accredited. This is documented in various papers and in my PhD: *How Can I Improve My Practice as a Superintendent of Schools and Create My Own Living Theory* (DeLong, 2002).

I have been exhibiting that sustained commitment with individuals like Liz Campbell. She wrote the following in her PhD: “What I ended up doing, thanks to Jackie DeLong and her introduction to Whitehead’s (1989) *Living Educational Theory*, was realizing that I did not need academia to validate my own lived experiences.” This reflection makes me feel that my influence has been

experienced in the most positive way possible. I have stayed connected to Liz Campbell 'through thick and thin' - through the delightful years 2009-2011 while she created a creative Masters project with poetry and paintings and inspirational voices from the literature (Campbell, 2011); her classroom work, in which she engaged with high school students in values-based research and visual data; the "epistemicide" (Santos, 2014) she experienced where her knowledge was killed off; through supervision obstacles and disillusionment; and finally in February, 2019 with her amazing tenacity through to graduation as Dr Liz (Campbell, 2019). On this latter point of epistemicide, (I wrote about epistemicide in my EJOLTs article, "Respecting and Legitimizing the Embodied Knowledge of Practitioners in Contexts of Power Struggles" (DeLong, 2017), Liz Campbell's doctorate highlights some of the political and cultural influences that reduce and hinder the expression of hope and practitioners' embodied knowledge:

"On Sunday afternoons, I participate in a living theory research support group. I began to explain my conundrum to the group when all of a sudden, I burst into tears. I do not cry very often, not because I think I should not for whatever reason; I just do not. Perhaps I do not cry often because I have suffered some great losses and it takes a lot to make me cry or maybe it is just my nature. Either way, I knew there was something significant going on when I burst into tears during my Skype call and I knew that I was about to have a growth spurt if I could see this as a challenge and not a threat. As J. Miller (2018) writes, "creative people see challenging situations as opportunities for spiritual growth rather than seeing them as threats. ... Love, creativity and gentleness are closely linked" (p. 11)." (Campbell, 2019, pp. 123-124)

Our educational conversations have stimulated my work through my dialogic way of being. In this clip, Liz encouraged me to make a list of my writings (DeLong, 2019a), as well as the people whom I have influenced in order to provide data as evidence of my claim of sustained commitment. After I say that I have been stomping around in "the swamp" (Schon, 1995), she gives me some suggestions for improving my writing.



Figure 1: Liz and Jackie discuss how to improve my ARNA paper:  
<https://youtu.be/X2qynnpsaWA>

"Liz: Make a bulleted list and really that's what the first section could be. And then you could reflect on whatever goes through your head at the time looking back at this list. ...And then the second part, 'the ontological importance of conversation and dialogue informs this educational approach to conversation as a research method'. To me there's

2 things there: ontological importance in the dialogue and the fact that you are calling it a research method. So which of these is the best example of the ontological importance or the dialectic relational whatever and which of these is the best example of the research method. And you could refer back to that bulleted list.

And the second part of that, 'it is embodied in my dialogic way of being'. Just pick one from that list and say this was a prime example and expand on that and then talk about the digital data."

Jackie: I should be able to rattle that off in a couple of hours.

Liz: Well, in an afternoon anyway!"

While recording, selecting clips and transcribing video data is time-consuming, I find such love, hope and joy (Liz's values that I share) in experiencing again the empathetic resonance in the conversations. I found that there was a plethora of raw data that requires editing and, in that process, I experience the art of finding themes in a personal inquiry as Marshall (1999) describes:

"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 (Marshall, 1999, p.4).

I move on now to making the connection between my dialogic way of being and how I create knowledge.

## **Part B. The relationship between my ontology and epistemology**

In this part, I explore the close relationship between my dialogic way of being and how I create knowledge (between the ontological and the epistemological) through educational conversations. My ontological values are clarified as the explanatory principles that I use to give meaning and purpose to my life and these explanatory principles are epistemologically significant in providing the living standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of my contribution to educational knowledge. I find that being able to analyze dialogic research data using the ontological values that I bring into the conversation has epistemological importance because being loved into learning and my dialogic way of being are the qualities that I bring into my relationships ontologically.

It's my way of being, but it is also related to my way of knowing, as well as to the contribution that I am making to educational theory and knowledge. I am highlighting the methodological importance of this ontological way of being and through my educational conversations 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 Cathy, Liz and Michelle. These three live in totally different contexts, are very different individuals, and yet each generated their own Living Theory accounts with deep insights.

Not only has dialogue been significant in my ontology as I supported living cultures of inquiry in the school district, it was my way of being. I recall when the school district executive council members were sitting around the table on Tuesday mornings, some members of the group would come to the meeting with fully-formed ideas based on their own internal thinking. I would inform them that, for me to support their proposals, I needed to hear aloud the conversations that they had had with themselves. In operating styles, this is referred to as introspective versus extrospective. As for my own ideas, I always needed to hear the various perspectives from the others as well as my own in order to fully process the proposed directions and directives.

Gadamer (1989) discusses the form of human interaction through dialogue:

“...To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. Hence it necessarily has the structure of question and answer. The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us. ... To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. p. 367

Because of my dialogic nature, I find that educational conversations between myself and other people, whom I love and respect, have helped me to clarify the meanings of my unique constellation of ontological values. Those values both help to constitute my way of being and also provide me with the explanatory principles of my educational influences, as evidenced within my own learning, within the learning of others, and within the learning of the social formations that I have both influenced and that have influenced me. The best means of communicating the relational dynamic between my ontology and my epistemology seems to be through actual conversations captured in video clips and writings.

One of my ontological and epistemological values is being loved into learning and my dialogic way of being. Cathy Griffin and I have learned from each other now over ten years commencing with the on-site Master’s cohort where I taught courses in the conference rooms in the Main Office of the Bluewater District School Board. In the final year of the cohort, I supported Cathy as she conducted her research for her Major Research Paper, “How can I improve my Practice by Living my Values of Love, Trust and Authenticity more fully?” (Griffin, 2012)

So to follow this line of argument, I embody my value of living conversations as educational, while, at the same time, I am collecting data for conducting research and creating knowledge. In this clip, dated June 8, 2019, I am co-creating knowledge with Cathy, analyzing the nature of my influence, and supporting her in a culture of inquiry. In this way, I am living my value of supporting her to understand the use of the camera for professional learning for the purpose of beginning a research network for creating living theories within living cultures of inquiry:



Figure 2: Cathy shares her story of supporting a teacher with the use of a camera  
[https://youtu.be/ChTq1\\_41Z3A](https://youtu.be/ChTq1_41Z3A)

In this clip with Cathy, a public school principal, I ask her to share her experience of working with a teacher who is working to improve her practice in teaching math. Cathy has given her a camera to tape her lesson. Cathy says:

“So the teacher is working on her own practice, watched herself and came to the BIG realization and the realization was that there was a distraction when she was focusing more on the math content of the lesson because she was not used to it. She was learning and she is doing a fabulous job of taking on the math material. But she changed her practice in that she would practice the lesson the night before with her husband who is not used to the new math and was a very good critic and asking her questions like why is this and why is that and learning how to do some of the visualizations that we're encouraging now .... So, she would go through it and she could see now that her confidence was there so she could focus on the students and their interaction with the material so that was a huge, huge piece of progress...

I am very excited now having started and had my first real experience mentoring one of my teachers as an administrator using the process that I have done with my colleagues in BARN where I was on level with them in terms of I wasn't their superior officer, their administrator; I was a colleague as a co-teacher sharing my own practice. So that viewpoint of being a researcher into my own practice while I'm doing that is very important/crucial for my modelling now working with a staff member in the teacher appraisal process. I feel better going into next year knowing that I can try.”



We hear her making the connection between the teacher's research, her modeling the self-study Living Theory process, using the camera on herself and, in essence, sharing her embodied knowledge. We hear her analyzing how being an administrator does not change the co-learning experience that she had experienced with her students and with her colleagues in the Bluewater Action Research Network (BARN). Then, she talks about the Professional Learning Community (PLC) that she is planning to create with a small group of fellow school administrators:

Jackie: "You mentioned about starting a group with fellow principals doing self-study action research/ Living Theory. What does that look like for you?"

Cathy: "I've always worked with my colleague within my own building and with my principal and now my vice-principal but I would really like to do something more intentional. In the last 2 years when I was Vice-Principal and now Principal, I feel like it hasn't been as intentional. I've been in a kind of metamorphosis stage. One of our teachers, EA's actually, put it a sign up in the bathroom and there's one that is beautiful about the pain that you are feeling being transformational. You're just becoming and to enjoy the process and realize that it is a process. A lovely quote...That's been very important to me over the past few years be patient with yourself: you are transforming. I've been watching, paying attention and trying some things and I feel like I'm getting some thoughts as to the way I want to go forward and I'm ready to participate in a PLC and be more intentional about the research I'm doing in my practice as an administrator."

Through this interaction, I am living my value of loving her into learning, influencing her to come back to intentional research within her practice, and, to build a living culture of inquiry with her fellow principals through a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Those values are my ontological and epistemological values that I use as standards of judgment. It seems to me that I am seeing my influence, my values are being lived in this interchange and we are both "living life as inquiry":

"By living life as inquiry, I mean a range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into questions. This involves, for example attempting to open to continual question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process its stages. It involves seeking to monitor how what I do relates to what I espouse, and to review this explicitly, possibly in collaboration with others, if there seems to be a mismatch." (Marshall, 1999, p. 2)

In an email (150619) response to this paper, Cathy said:

"A Skype session with you is a reflective, research space for me. I automatically prepare for a conversation by returning to my values and examining what I am doing in my work and my life. I enter the conversation knowing that you will be a loving listener with concern for my health and well-being above all. I also enter the conversation knowing that, as an astute LET (Living Educational Theory) researcher, you will help me identify and clarify important points in my journey to improving what I am doing and she will validate or question the claims I make about my practice. That sounds so technical and 'researchy'. But the reality is much different than that because of the love that underpins the relationship and because of the loving actions you make in line with your values. For example, in the clip above, you honour my time more than once by checking if my

household is getting up and needs my attention and by suggesting a next meeting time that suits my schedule which may be more complicated. You voice concern that I don't spend my weekend looking for a video clip for you but take time to relax. You voice your love at the end of each email and voice call. It may seem trite to an onlooker, but it is foundational to the work we do together. The unconditional love an example of your values in action (ontology) and your intentional creation of a space in which it is safe to do Living Educational Theory action research.”

In the next section, I focus on two of my values, both learned from educational conversations.

### **Part C. Values of “setting my ego at the door” and being “loved into learning” as living standards of judgment**

In this part, I focus on my recent mentoring (Yamamoto, 1998) relationship with Michelle Vaughan (Vaughan, 2017) where she uses the phrase, “setting my ego at the door” as my way creating a living culture of inquiry. I like Michelle’s reference to Freire’s language of “authentic educational experience”:

“Creating an organized context that exudes warmth sets the stage for a meaningful relationship to flourish and shows respect for students. In doing so, I am working from Freire’s (1998) ideas on the role of respect in student learning:

‘The climate of respect that is born of just, serious, humble, and generous relationships, in which both the authority of the teacher and the freedom of the students are ethically grounded, is what converts pedagogical space into authentic educational experience.’” (p. 86) (Vaughan, 2019, p. 68)

Michelle felt that she was “loved into learning” as described by Liz Campbell:

“One of the key findings in my Master’s Research Project (MRP) was my ability to reveal, clarify, and explicate my embodied expression of being “loved into learning” (Campbell, 2012, p. 69). Jacqueline DeLong, one of my course instructors in the Master’s program and who eventually became my supervisor, stood in front of the entire class and told us she loved us. DeLong’s actions aligned with her values and this inspired me to believe in myself, to realize that I had something significant to contribute and that I could live more fully according to my values. In addition, I felt trusted and respected which enabled me to continue my research with more confidence and authenticity. Recognizing that I had something of value to contribute enabled me to read the theories of others with a more critical lens which enhanced my learning journey. I refer to this process as loved into learning.” (Campbell, 2019, p. 14)

The ontological importance of conversation and dialogue in my relationships and the nature of my influence can be seen through the videos and emails, embodied in a form of inquiry that focuses on dialogue. I am experiencing a real pleasure in this co-learning relationship with Michelle that I feel is a hopeful and loving educational activism in living-theories for social transformation. Our educational conversations have helped another Living Theory (Vaughan, 2019) to emerge.

The conversations are made both important and legitimate through the research process whereby I am showing my educational influence with Michelle Vaughan. 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)

Michelle shares the pervasive and transformational nature of creating her own living-theory in the following clip on Jan 25, 2019,

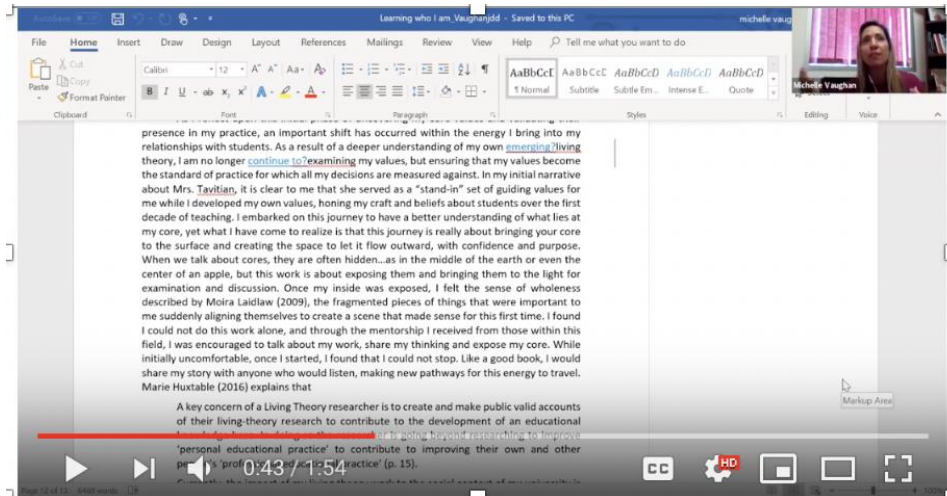


Figure 3. Zoom Meeting with Michelle’s article on screen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnyXGcLrrtU&feature=youtu.be>

“Michelle: So, writing this is reflecting on my practice and my story and who I am and my values but the actual act of writing it impacted how I behave currently in my context. I could not turn it off so in every department meeting, in every conversation with a peer, there it was a constantly, it was an on-going on the spot reflection of ‘Am I true to my values?’ in this – even though it was outside of what would be “practice. Right?”

I mean, it became all-encompassing and it’s similar to what I talked about as, you know, that core kind of came to the surface and kind of spread out. There was no siloed portion of my life where this didn’t have an impact and so I think it is much more than just ‘How do I improve my practice?’ It really is, ‘How do I be the best version of myself?’ Like you said earlier. How do I live this day-to-day? Instead of just, ‘How do I get better at what I do?’”



Figure 3: Loved into learning and leaving ego at the door  
<https://youtu.be/wjm13drYVQc>

When I shared with Michelle the “loved into learning” language, Michelle responded by describing my way of being that encouraged her research as “leaving my ego at the door”:

“I think that’s accurate. It’s something about you not bringing your ego into it which I think allows the love to flow through. I think to be able to show genuine love and also having your ego: they don’t play well together in the sandbox. So, if you really want to have somebody feel that emotion, I think you approach a lot of these relationships without ego and that is, in my experience, rare in higher education...It feels like everybody needs two chairs; one for your body and one for your ego.”

The next thread brings us to my activism in the Living Theory movement for the flourishing of humanity.

#### **Part D. My sustained commitment to activism with other living theorists across the globe**

In this part, I endeavour to explain my contributions to the expansion of the Living Theory movement and its influence in creating a better world. While I understand the demoralization and devaluation that can accompany the globalizing influences of neo-liberal economic policies, I rarely feel that negativity because I am by nature optimistic, maybe overly optimistic; and, I can usually find a way of viewing the situation in a positive, hopeful, and loving educational way by supporting activism in living-theories for the intention of creating social transformation. This is not to say that I don’t recognize the challenges and obstacles facing people here and away. In Liz’s doctoral studies, she faced unconscionable “epistemicide” (Santos, 2014) over years and; in the end, her supervisor claimed the idea that she might research love in the classroom, as she had always wanted! Obstacles and challenges to conducting Living Theory research can be found in my 2017 EJOLTs article (DeLong, 2017). It’s just that I tend to find ways around obstacles or understand the need sometimes to retreat in order to go forward again.

Educational conversations, grounded in values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity, can contribute to overcoming such demoralization and devaluation in hopeful and loving processes of social transformation. In our Zoom conversation, Michelle found that her research and her new way of life mitigated feeling down about academic pressures.

Since I first modeled the significance of recording your own practice and making yourself vulnerable in allowing your students and staff to evaluate your practice, the groups and individuals, with whom I have worked, have seen the usefulness of the visual data in providing evidence to support claims to know and in providing evidence of their values in action or their “living contradictions” (Whitehead, 1989). I shared with the Bluewater Masters cohort my use of video and democratic evaluation with my family of schools’ principals as described in my PhD thesis (DeLong, 2002) and had them evaluate my teaching in 2010.



Figure 4. Democratic Evaluation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SShZFmETpkk>

Judy McBride asked, “My question is in what way is your work activism?” (email 140619) So, in my mind, my activism resides in contributing to positive change by building living cultures of inquiry where I love others into learning and improve their lives. In this culture, I encourage myself and others to be better, to be kind, to love, to speak with their own voice.

For me, the Living Theory social movement are like ripples on a pond:

At the centre of this ripple is Jack Whitehead, the creator of the Living Theory methodology, who taught me Living Theory, supported me to create my own living theory, and continues to encourage and support me in my postdoctoral research.

The first circle is me with outbound movement to my staff, teacher researchers, school system and conferences in the province. For the full description of the beginning and development of living theory research in my school district, as well as the creation in 1988 of The Ontario Action

Researcher, (which is now The Canadian Journal of Action Research), see Sustained Support for Action Research in Grand Erie in Passion in Professional Practice [http://schools.granderie.ca/ar/passion/pppi/1\\_Into\\_TOC.pdf](http://schools.granderie.ca/ar/passion/pppi/1_Into_TOC.pdf) (Delong, 2001, p. 11–22) and Chapter 3B, Sustaining Support for Inquiry (Delong, 2002, pp. 153–227).

The second circle is from me, (I facilitated the learning of the Bluewater Master’s cohort in which Cathy and Liz were members), to Cathy, to her students to her staff, to the Bluewater Action Research Network, (that she and Liz created and supported), to her PLC, to her school system, and to the province through her Television Ontario modules.

The third circle is from me to Liz, to her high school students, to the Bluewater Action Research Network, to Nipissing University where she received her doctorate, to her Masters students at the University of Prince Edward Island, where she is teaching Living Theory/Action Research in July, 2019.

The most recent circle is from me to Michelle to her doctoral students to the Florida Atlantic University system through her ‘living curriculum’ (Delong, 2019) and her presentations to University staff.

On the topic of dialogical relationships in a culture of inquiry, one of the participants, Judy McBride, wrote about the ALARA workshop that Jack Whitehead, Marie Huxtable and I presented (<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwworkshopalara2018.pdf>) and saw the “evolution of a social movement” (email March 17, 2019):

“I feel that the visuals support the notion *learning in dialogic, educational relationship*. The participants attend first to the instructions, then to each other, and finally back to the whole. The conversation begins with the invitation to share values, something deeply personal with – I believe in most cases – a stranger. This says a lot about your ability to create a culture of inquiry that is welcoming, safe and exciting as well. Participants reflect, share, know, and learn in physical/spatial relation. I recognize sharing, knowing and learning in digital relation and the evolution of a social movement.” (Delong, 2019, p. 6)

As Cornell West (2008) states, “you must have a compassion for something bigger than your own egocentric predicament” (p. 35). My sustained commitment to activism with other living theorists across the globe is the “something bigger” than myself and my contribution of my 15% (Morgan, 1988) to improve the world.

In an email (150619) response to the paper, Cathy said:

“I had to look up the definition of activism to see if I agree that what you do, what we do, is activism. The google dictionary definition of activism is, “the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.” It is clear to me that you are “campaigning” or working” in an organized and active way toward a particular goal” (another google definition) of influencing more educators and students to flourish through taking an active stance as a researcher into their own practice and being a part of a loving culture of inquiry. Is it ‘vigorous’ or “strong, healthy, and full of energy” (google again). YES! Any action taken based on our core values is vital, energetic, authentic. It feels and comes across as vigorous. You haven’t given up on me yet, Jackie! You check in on me regularly and invite me to keep going, keep researching

and writing. You help me to be better at what I do. I feel your positive energy and support and draw on it.”

Next, I spend a few paragraphs on validation.

### **Part E. Validation Group**

The technique for strengthening the validity of research accounts involves validation groups of peers using questions derived from Habermas’ (1976, pp. 2-3) four criteria of social validity in communication and social evolution of comprehensibility, rightness, truth and authenticity.

I submitted my evidence-based explanations of educational influence to my validation group group: Cathy Griffin, Liz Campbell, Michelle Vaughan, Judy McBride, Tim Pugh and Jack Whitehead. I plan to include their insights to strengthen the paper and asked them to include in their comments responses to four questions that focus on:

- i) How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- ii) How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the assertions I make?
- iii) How could I extend and deepen my socio-historical and sociocultural awareness of the ecological complexities that influence my practice and my explanation?
- iv) How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in showing over time and interaction that I am living my espoused values as fully as I can?

Jack Whitehead said, “-it's clear, the argument holds together, there is adequate data as evidence for the claims, it's comprehensible, trustworthy... I think it reads very clearly and I sense your own excitement that in producing the paper you have taken forward your own understandings as well as my own. It holds together well and documents a new phase in your inquiry.” (email, 13062019)

Judy McBride said, “The evidence is there, expressed in black, white and colour texts, images and motion, sound and voice. Joyful, loving, excited, knowledgeable, inquiring. And, expressing the possibility of movement, betterment, hope. There is a confluence of sources of evidence that creates a whole picture of who you are as an inquirer, what you do, how you do it, with whom, for what purpose, and with what results. The reader/viewer/listener is welcomed into the picture in an interactive way if the willingness is there. The authenticity of your explanation is exquisitely clear in the data that you offer as evidence of your influence.” (email 140619)

Tim Pugh said,

### **Part F. Pulling together the threads and the next braid**

This analogy in the title is from métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009) explained by Judy McBride. Our wonderful Postdoc community that meets on Sunday morning (in Canada) and Sunday afternoon (in the UK and India) has been very helpful in bringing this paper to a conclusion:





Marie (UK), Jackie (Ontario, Canada), Judy (Quebec, Canada), Swaroop (India)  
Figure 5: Métissage explained : <https://youtu.be/dsgP54w16i8>

Judy: Looking at métissage as it's practised by others... because at the end, all of your strands should come together to create some kind of a whole. I think that I understand what you are saying how they come together with your long complicated title but would your reader? There has to be this coming together at some point; a logic to it, I guess. That's typically how métissage is used in the academic community. I'm thinking of Lethbridge UBC and Simon Fraser in particular. The lines don't become anonymous; they are all identified by author and they are on a theme but there is a coming together at the end of the book or chapter. You understand how they come together because they are brought together at the end.

Marie: If you want to bounce anything around, Jackie. If I can help, I will.

Jackie: I think I need another couple of hours to see if I can't start pulling the threads together because right now they feel like they are loose out there flowing in the wind.

Judy: Sometimes it's the other "I" too that helps to bring the braid together. When we braid, lines are nominated and I say to myself sometimes, "Why did they pick that line?; I wrote so many other great lines. And it's the other "I" that sees the value or the logic or the purpose or meaning as to why that fits in the braid.

Jackie. That's a very nice analogy.

One of the many benefits of using values as explanatory principles and standards of judgment is that an alignment emerges such as the close relationship in my life between the ontological and the epistemological. My ontological values are clarified as the explanatory principles that I use to give meaning and purpose to my life and these explanatory principles are epistemologically significant in providing the living standards of judgment that can be used to evaluate the validity of the contribution to educational knowledge.

The explanations of influence include explanatory principles of being loved into learning, setting the ego at the door, living culture of inquiry, and educational conversations and dialogue as research data. The explanations of my educational influences in learning have extended from my years as superintendent in a school district to a teacher of Masters' cohorts to a Living Theory consultant, both locally and globally. I have extended this influence into global educational conversations and social transformation using digital, visual technology.



Part of this contribution is requiring the legitimization of such activist forms of knowledge in the global Academy using digital visual data from multi-screen Skype conversations and digital technologies. Practitioner-researchers like Cathy Griffin, Michelle Vaughan and Elizabeth Campbell show how dominant academic reasoning and epistemology can be understood and transcended in the generation of the living-educational-theories of individuals, grounded in their experiences and contexts. MacIntyre (1988) says:

"The rival claims to truth of contending traditions of enquiry depend for their vindication upon the adequacy and the explanatory power of the histories which the resources of each of those traditions in conflict enable their adherents to write." (p. 403)

The next braids include papers and presentations at the CARN/ALARA conference in Slip Croatia in October 2019 where our Living Theory community will be continue our hopeful and loving educational activism in living-theories for social transformation. It is likely that our editor, Marie Huxtable, will be looking for an article for the December issue of EJOLTs from this research. Michelle and I are planning a paper on our learning in the ARNA workshop that we will be leading on June 27, 2019. Finally, I am hoping that from this conference will emerge opportunities to encourage and support researchers new to Living Theory as they look to create their own living theories.

In conclusion, I recognize that the very reflection of my learning here has begun its journey outward from myself on the deepening of the ripples that are already in perpetual transit – ripples that I embrace through the intersections of living my learning with others – those whom I value and love; and, others whom I have yet to meet, who will read and listen to my work – to all of you, I would ask you to love me through this learning so that I may strengthen it with your insights:

My readers are the completers of what the text began. I address them as co-creators, unknown but for sure out there and exacting (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 13).

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