

# The Wiki of Living Theory: A celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EJOLTS publication.

## 1. Context

### **EJOLTS commitment and scope**

The Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs) is committed to publishing living-educational-theory (often shortened to living-theory) accounts of practitioner-researchers from a wide range of global, social, cultural and professional contexts. The journal welcomes submissions from all Living Educational Theory (often shortened to Living Theory) researchers who wish to contribute rigorous and valid accounts of their living-theories to improving educational knowledge.

The journal focuses on the living-theories of practitioner-researchers. Researchers generate their living-theories as their values-based "... explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations" (Whitehead, 1989) in the process of researching questions of the kind *How do I improve what I am doing?* The values at the heart of Living Educational Theory research (often shortened to Living Theory research) are the life-enhancing values that are relational and ontological, in the sense that they give meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals and groups. They are values that carry hope for the future of humanity, such as love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, care and democracy.

### **The Tenth Anniversary Edition**

The June 2018 edition of EJOLTs marked the tenth anniversary since the first publication in 2008. This notable anniversary offered an opportunity for the EJOLTS community to pause from its usual activities within the journal and to reflect on the accomplishments of the past decade. An obvious focus for that reflection would be to ask the question: "How is EJOLTs contributing to the evolution of educational research?" while bearing in mind that well-known and perennial 'hot potato' of a question: "Just what is educational about educational research?"

As a response to these questions, I suggested to other members of the Editorial Board that the tenth anniversary edition of EJOLTs in June 2018 could take the form of a review that is produced through a collaborative effort by the EJOLTs community. The Wiki of Living Educational Theory – consisting of contributions from the perspective of individual's living-educational-theories – is the result. It is being created by the EJOLTs community as a collaborative effort spread over time.

## 2. Why a Wiki?

Ward Cunningham and co-author Bo Leuf, in their book *The Wiki Way: Quick Collaboration on the Web*, described the essence of the Wiki concept as follows:

"A wiki invites all users – not just experts – to edit any page or to create new pages within the wiki Web site, using only a standard 'plain-vanilla' Web browser without any extra add-ons.

"Wiki promotes meaningful topic associations between different pages by making page link creation intuitively easy and showing whether an intended target page exists or not.

"A wiki is not a carefully crafted site created by experts and professional writers, and designed for casual visitors. Instead, it seeks to involve the typical visitor/user in an ongoing process of creation and collaboration that constantly changes the website landscape.

"A wiki enables communities of editors and contributors to write documents collaboratively. All that people require to contribute is a computer, Internet access, a web browser and a basic understanding of a simple markup language (e.g. HTML).

"A single page in a wiki website is referred to as a 'wiki page', while the entire collection of pages, which are usually well-interconnected by hyperlinks, is 'the wiki'.

"A wiki is essentially a database for creating, browsing, and searching through information. A wiki allows non-linear, evolving, complex and networked text, while also allowing for editor argument, debate and interaction regarding the content and formatting. A defining characteristic of wiki technology is the ease with which pages can be created and updated. Generally, there is no review by a moderator or gatekeeper before modifications are accepted and thus lead to changes on the website. Many wikis are open to alteration by the general public without requiring registration of user accounts. Many edits can be made in real-time and appear almost instantly online. However, this feature facilitates abuse of the system. Private wiki servers require user authentication to edit pages, and sometimes even to read them. ... open wikis produce a process of Social Darwinism. 'Unfit' sentences and sections are ruthlessly culled, edited and replaced if they are not considered 'fit', which hopefully results in the evolution of a higher quality and more relevant page. While such openness may invite 'vandalism' and the posting of untrue information, this same openness also makes it possible to rapidly correct or restore a 'quality' wiki page."

Given this review of what a wiki is and turning to the EJOLTS website, I understand the spirit of EJOLTS to be:

"... committed to publishing ... [LET researcher's] accounts ... that explain their educational influences .... in terms of values ... [that] are ontological in the sense that they are used to give meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals" (<http://ejolts.net/about> *Commitment and Scope*).

I understand the review criteria (<http://ejolts.net/files/Reviewing%20process2.pdf>) to require a paper to account for learning influences developed by the author, who should also reveal a desire to bring certain values more fully into the world. The criteria also ask reviewers to bring to the review process the question: "In what ways might your own experiences and insights be brought to bear in order to enhance the submission in some way?"

Authors are then requested to work with reviewers' postings to create a paper publishable in EJOLTS – and further:

"Rather than a review being perceived as a static process, we are hoping it will engage you [the reviewer] and the authors (and anyone who is interested) in dynamic discussions about how we might, together, improve what we are doing" (<http://ejolts.net/files/Reviewing%20process2.pdf>).

Thus, we have EJOLTS as a collaborative community of practice through which papers are produced by a process that includes a reiterative *dialectical* review – as the EJOLTS preamble states: "... how we might, together, improve what we are doing". The *process* by which EJOLTS publishes finished papers is as important for the development of Living Theory as is the content of the finished papers themselves.

I am suggesting that both a wiki and an EJOLTS paper are the result of collaboration within a community as a co-operative effort. Moreover, compared to the EJOLTS generative process, I would claim that wiki creation involves a more dynamic and plastic form of collaboration that can engage the efforts of a large number of individuals over an extended period of time.

### 3. A Wiki of Living Educational Theory

#### a. Structure

Michael Kosok<sup>1</sup> spoke of development (which I subsume into the term 'education') as "... an open-ended nonlinear dialectic process that can be depicted as a self-linearizing form, which reveals transition structures as nodal points of self-reflection" (abstract). Thus, we linearise our non-linear lived experience within our accounts – but, if we are not careful, we become seduced by our own rhetoric as we construct Kierkegaard's 'unity in the imagination' that loses contact with practical reality. I am hoping that the wiki structure will permit our non-linear experiences to remain non-linear as we construct our 'bite-sized' pages, through which our future readers will navigate their own selected paths as they make their own meanings.

In this manner, the Wiki of Living Theory – *as a three-dimensional hyperlinked structure* – consists of contributions that may be loosely sorted under the three headings: 'It', 'I', and 'We', *which exist within a continuous series of hierarchical levels*<sup>2</sup>. These three levels will be highlighted for emphasis as **|It|**, **|I|**, and **|We|** from this point onwards.

- The **|It|** surface levels: objective definitions giving Living Theory researchers' understandings of the words that make up contributors' shared vocabulary
- The **|I|** intermediate levels: uses insights from personal practice to give living meaning to researchers' claims to knowledge based on the vocabulary of the **|It|** level.
- The **|We|** deeper levels: represented by the dialectical engagement of contributors in forming new shared meanings from the individual insights offered at the **|I|** level.

#### b. Focus Questions

During discussions with the EJOLTS Editorial Board, I have suggested that initial contributors should each identify a good-quality 'Focus Question' that defines their personal living-theory perspective within this collaborative endeavour. I had earlier developed an initial focus question in order to start my contribution to the wiki. It

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<sup>1</sup> Kosok, M. (1976) The Systematization of Dialectical Logic for the Study of Development and Change. *Human Development*, Vol. 19, 6, pp. 325–350.

<sup>2</sup> You need to pause here and think carefully about the meanings that you are constructing from these two italicised phrases.

derived from the editorial foreword that I had written for the June 2017 edition of EJOLTS. At the core of this foreword was my concern that the educational impetus contained in each of the edition's papers, as absorbed via our readings, should have the effect of improving our own personal practices. On each of my reader's behalves, I had asked the question: "What effect is a specific Living Theory paper having on my actions in the world as I attempt to contribute to its transformation into becoming a better place?" I continued:

"... my intention, as I engage with the four main papers in this edition of EJOLTS, is to go beyond "hope for the future" and to ask what I and other readers are actually being led to do at the point of reading. What is going to happen to the behaviour-in-the-world of each of us, as our individual lives touch and interact with the lives of others? A given paper might make me, as its reader, think; it might offer me hope for the flourishing of humanity; but what am I actually going to do as the result of my reading? It is one thing to hold certain values and to have those values confirmed or challenged by the writings of others – but it is a further step for those writings to make me behave in my life in a better way. It is not enough to exchange affirming thoughts amongst ourselves within the living theory community – each of us has to 'get out there' and do something. For me, being conscious of needing to take this further step responds to the nagging question that always attends my contemplation of the EJOLTS project: What use has all this effort been?"

In this context, I was using the word *use* as *utility*, in terms of it leading to *practical action*.

So the short form of my question is:

*What use has all this effort been?*

A longer version might be:

*A living theory paper is an account of educational enquiry leading towards improvement: how can I translate the improvement described and explained in the paper into improvement in my life and educational practice?*

## **(ii) Initial Focus Questions from other members of the EJOLTS community**

### **Arianna**

Why do I do what I do?

### **Caitriona**

How do I understand the development of educational knowledge in my roles in EJOLTS?

### **Jack**

How can I enhance my contribution to Living Theory research as a social movement?

### **Jacqueline**

What is the nature of the influence of EJOLTS on me – and what is the nature of my influence on EJOLTS?

### **Máirín**

How might I enhance my practice as co-convener of NEARI (Network of Educational Action Research in Ireland)?

**Marie**

What can be learned from how we have tried to develop our democratic ways of working to create EJOLTs together?

**Moir**

How can I continue to support EJOLTS as I create my own living-educational-theory?

**Pip**

How and why do we discover ourselves as living contradictions?

**Swaroop**

How can my living educational theory enable me to overcome my ahankar [ego] and thus help me gain steerta [stability/ serenity] to my practice?

#### 4. A survey of the evolving Wiki of Living Theory

Entering the word *Wiki* into a standard search engine will reveal an extremely large number of separate wiki sites dedicated to an enormous range of subject areas. In addition to the ubiquitous *Wikipedia* site ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)) that is known and used daily by hundreds of millions of people, examples of more-specialist sites include:

- For players of the video game *Terraria*  
[https://terraria.gamepedia.com/Terraria\\_Wiki](https://terraria.gamepedia.com/Terraria_Wiki)
- How to do anything (practical)  
<https://www.wikihow.com/Main-Page>
- All about Mikrotik™ routers and wireless systems  
[https://wiki.mikrotik.com/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://wiki.mikrotik.com/wiki/Main_Page)

However, a swift perusal of these and other wiki sites reveals the great majority to be based on factual and objectivised knowledge, *Wikipedia* itself stipulating that contributions must not contain original research. These requirements indicate that a standard wiki site is operating at the **[It]** level that I refer to above (3.a) – the **[I]** and the **[We]** levels do not form part of their structure. In this respect, the *Wiki of Living Theory* is attempting to break new ground and to establish the processes for incorporating the **[I]** and the **[We]**.

In order to illustrate how this expansion of the wiki genre might be achieved, I shall use my evolving contributions to the Wiki of Living Theory as the basis for a ‘guided tour’ to describe its current structure and to explain how I intend to progress my own wiki-based living-theory enquiry into my focus question *What use has all this effort been?* (longer version – *A living theory paper is an account of educational enquiry leading towards improvement: how can I translate the improvement described and explained in the paper into improvement in my life and educational practice?*) I am hoping that this survey will encourage you to understand the opportunities that the wiki format offers as an alternative (promoting ...” meaningful topic associations” see Cunningham and Leuf above) to the usual linear and developmental texts well known to us as ‘papers’.

This survey starts with Main Page (sometimes called the ‘Home Page’) of the Wiki of Living Theory, which is accessed via the link

[http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://ejolts-wiki.mattrink.co.uk/index.php/Main_Page)

At this point, I suggest you open the Main Page in a separate window on your PC screen set alongside the window containing this text.

This page opens with a 'mission statement' for the project:

"The purpose of the Living Theory Wiki is to offer an alternative channel into the understanding of Living Theory research, taking advantage of the hyperlinked relationship between ideas."

The following section outlines the commitment and scope of EJOLTS, with key terms linked to separate pages that explain and develop these terms e.g.

- [EJOLTS](#)
- [living-educational-theory](#)
- [practitioner-researchers](#)
- [Living Educational Theory](#)
- [rigorous and valid accounts](#)
- [Living Educational Theory research](#)
- [values](#)
- [A Glossary](#)

It also contains a link to a paper (Whitehead, 1989[[1](#)])

Some of these pages contain links to further explanatory pages or to external websites and resources. These pages form the core of the [It] content of the wiki and define the major terms associated with Living Theory and the associations between them. Any page that includes any of these terms should contain links to these definition pages. The aim is always that the wiki user can follow their own line of enquiry via the association of ideas that develops through a form of internalised questioning and wiki-page answering that leads on to yet more questions. It is as if the user is carrying out a form of action enquiry centred on their 'concern' question and pursued from point to point through the structure of the wiki.

As you read further down the Main Page, you will encounter an outline of how the tenth anniversary acted as the impetus for establishing the wiki, followed by the rationale for the wiki and its structure.

Finally, the idea of *Focus Questions* is introduced, by which each contributor to the wiki identifies a good-quality question that expresses the living-theory enquiry that they propose to pursue within the collaborative endeavour of the wiki. Each individual's enquiry starts off from the link associated with their name in the list near the foot of the page. I shall now use my own entry in the list to illustrate how I am attempting to use the wiki structure and process to explore my question "What use has all this effort been?"

Clicking the link [Pete](#) takes you to a page that outlines the genesis of my focus question. The link at the foot of the page – "Continue to the review of [Pete's Question](#)" leads to a page that contains all the main elements of my enquiry. The aim of this page is to give a sense of who I am, in terms of my values, my ethics and my educational interests. The core of my living-theory enquiry that issues from my focus

question is revealed to be concerned with the idea of education as an exploration of 'self and other' and of 'prejudice' as being inimical to this exploration. My focus question challenges me to show how I have "... *translated the improvement described and explained in [a] living-theory paper into improvement in my life and educational practice.*" Under the sub-heading An Accompanying Paper, I write:

"... As a practical engagement with my Focus Questions and with my Personal Ethic held in mind, I am calling on the paper by Jerome Thamsanqa Gumede - *Journey to Living Theory Development of a Black African (Zulu) Male Educator: The Challenge of Doctoral Research*[\[1\]](#) - that was published in the December 2017 edition of EJOLTS.

"Quoting phrases from the [abstract](#), I see [Jerome engaging with] many of the educational issues that have concerned me over many years concerning self and other and prejudice:

- the incommensurability between cultures
- the abstract universalism currently embedded in western-centric philosophies
- the oral versus the literate
- development of new epistemologies
- cultural translation ... and the links to be made between cultural perspectives.

"To which I would add:

- Western reason as a destructive force ([Rick Roderick, 1986](#))
- responses to incommensurable paradigms ([Robert Donmoyer, 1996](#))
- living and working in Nigeria as an [Oyinbo](#)
- [the logic of question and answer](#).

These pages form the core of the |I| content of my contribution to the wiki.

The account of my enquiry stops at this point because the enquiry is about to enter its next phase. My intention for the future is to contact Jerome and to ask if he will engage with me in a correspondence that establishes a relationship between our two ongoing life-long educational enquiries. I will seek his help through dialogue to probe his paper for insights into my enquiry – an enquiry that is also his, in that we both seek to identify and confront the effects of prejudice in our lives and come to see each other more clearly and more fully.

These pages will form the core of the |We| content of my contribution to the wiki.

Pete Mellett  
12<sup>th</sup> July 2018