

# ALARA 2024 Conference

ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION  
RESEARCH FOR TRANSFORMATIONS

UTS, SYDNEY, 7-8 NOVEMBER

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Participatory Action Learning and Action Research  
for Sustainable Learning in a Higher Education Context

**ASHNIE MAHADEW**

Early Childhood Education

Online Presentation



**INSPIRING GREATNESS**  
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# Participatory Action Learning and Action Research for Sustainable Learning in a Higher Education Context

## ASHNIE MAHADEW

Online Presentation



UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL  
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

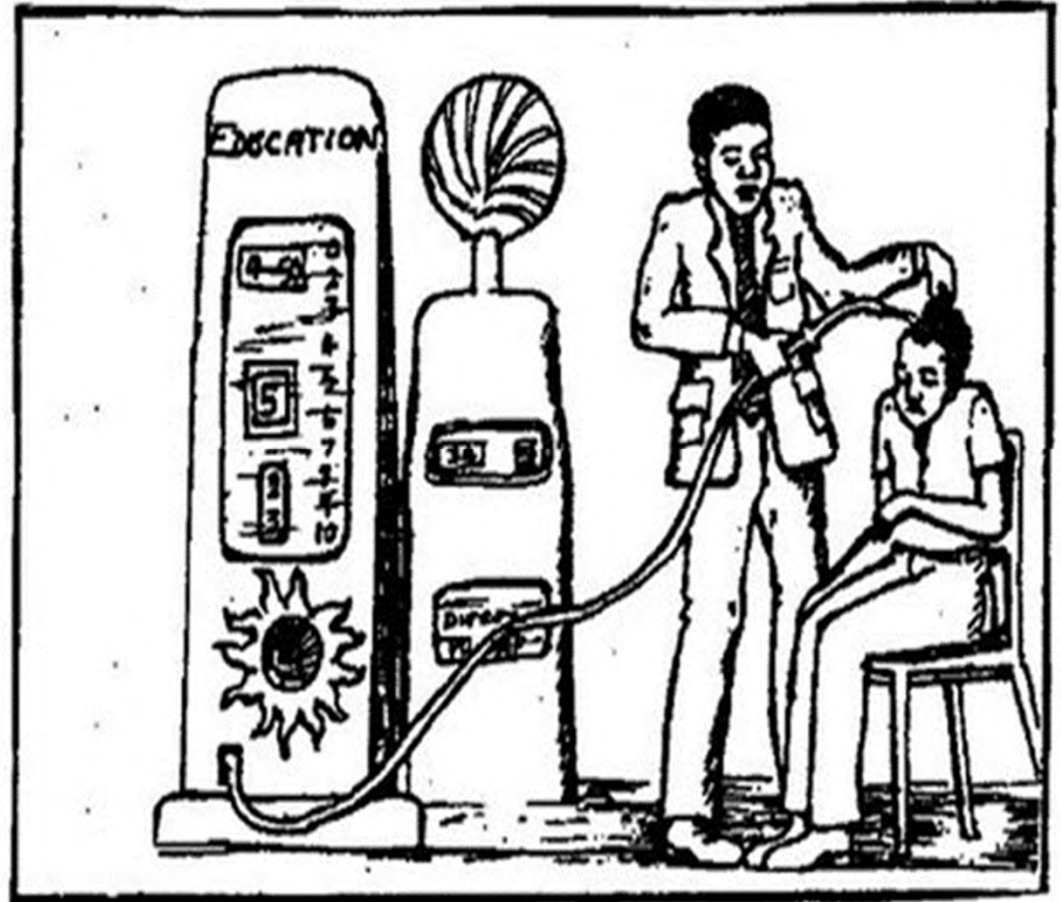
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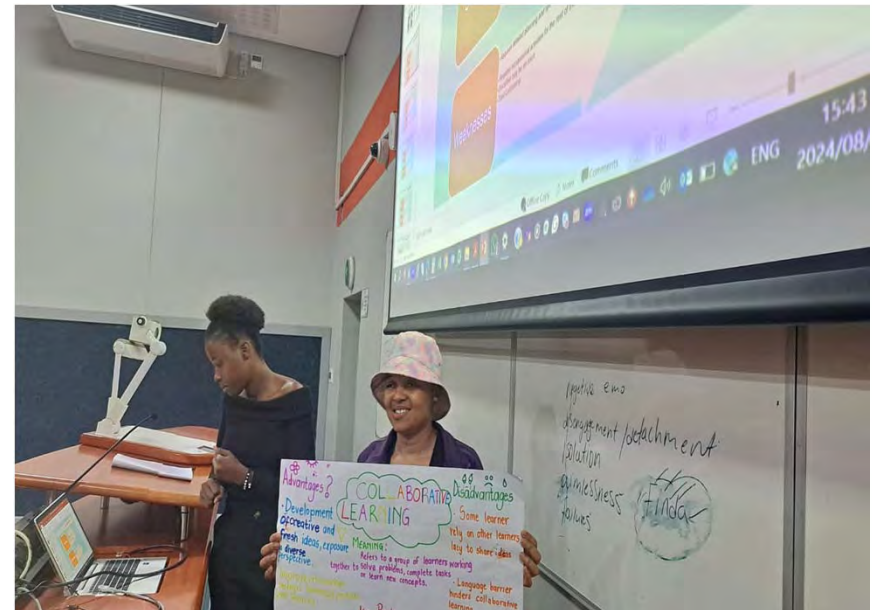
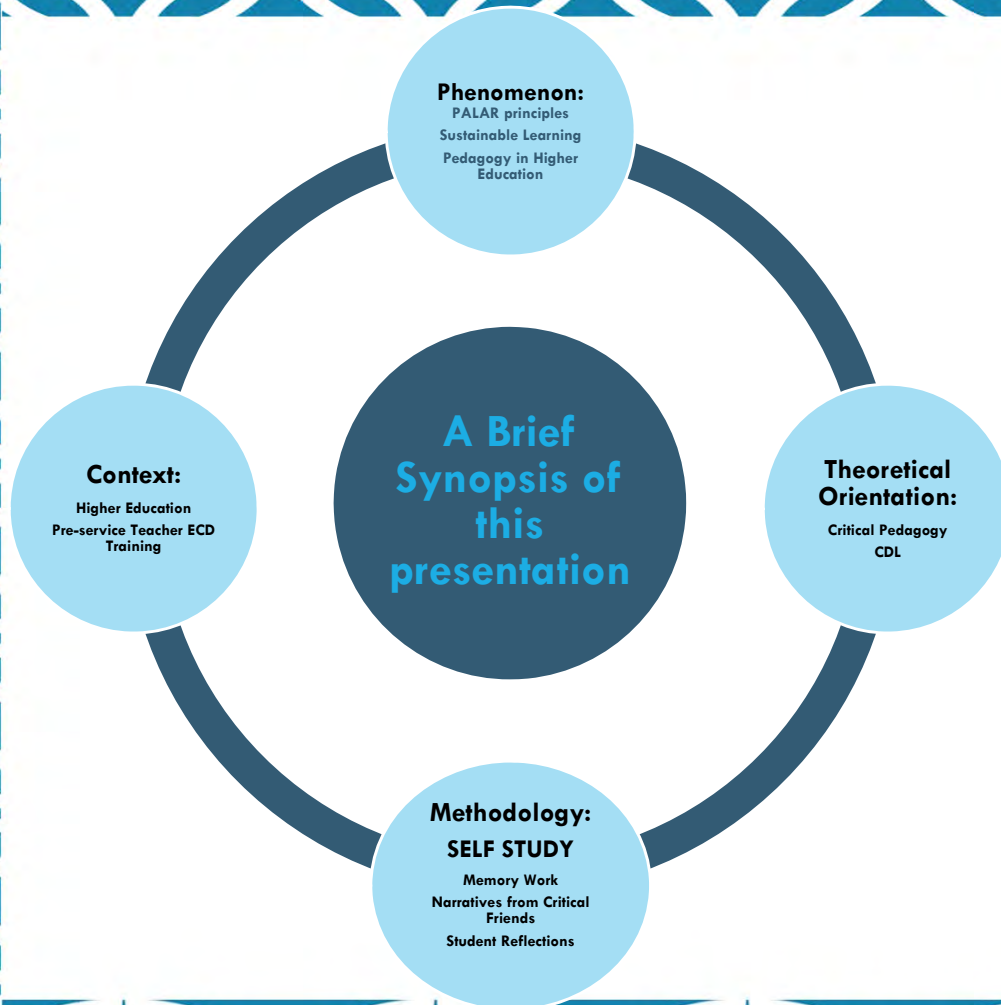
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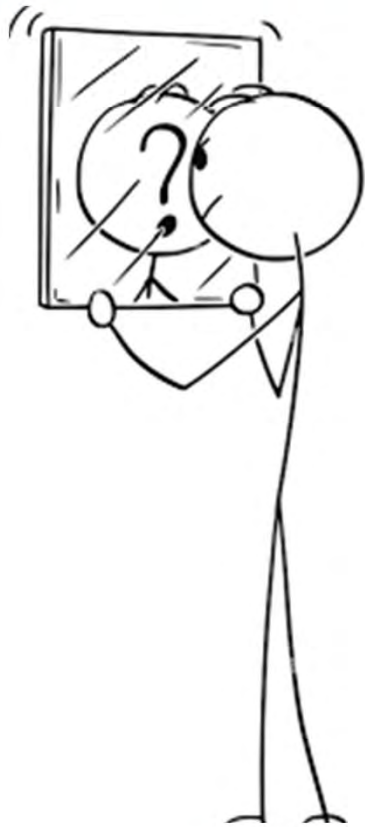
## RESPONSES TO IMAGE

1. What do you **see** in this picture?

2. What is really happening in this picture? How does this image relate to participatory action learning and action research?







## Take a look at yourself and make the change!!!

Authenticity as PALAR researchers

Conscientization

Critical awareness

Critical conscientization

Critical Diversity Literacy – Mellissa Steyn

**Change will not  
come if we wait  
for some other  
person or some  
other time.**

We are the ones we've been  
waiting for. We are the change  
that we seek.

Barack Obama

# **SUSTAINABLE LEARNING?**



# WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE LEARNING?

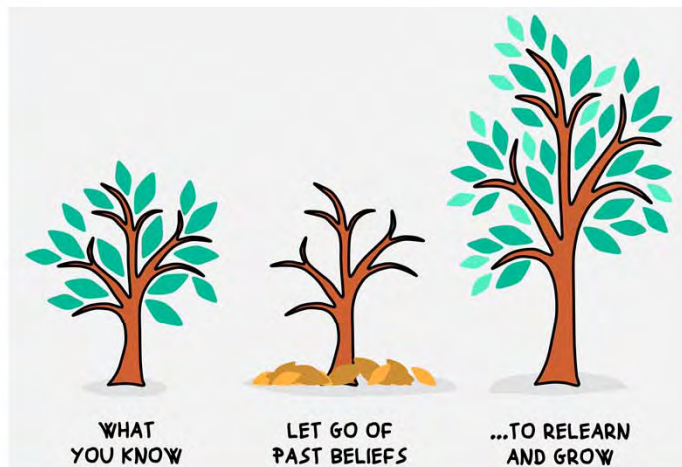
Scholars emphasise that sustainable **learning continues despite adversity and across various contexts** (Ben-Iliyahu, 2021; Hays & Reinders, 2020). This is significant in initial teacher education as it prepares teachers to embrace and accommodate diverse learners in their future classrooms. Teachers plan and prepare lessons that are contextually and culturally relevant to their learners. Also, becoming lifelong learners, education is not confined to the classroom or a specific period of life and they can adapt their teaching to accommodate the rapid changes in the present educational landscape (Fidalgo & Thormann, 2024). Hence, in teacher education, the concept of sustainable learning aligns with SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2017), where initial teacher education is not just geared towards preparing students to complete their degrees but enables them to contribute positively to the lives of their future learners and eventually make a positive difference in society.

# SUSTAINABLE LEARNING



a teacher is not some empowered person who has figured out the problems of an unequal world and stands to dispense this wisdom to receiving students....the teachers are themselves carriers of troubled knowledge, and this has serious implications for critical education.

Jansen, 2009



LEARN



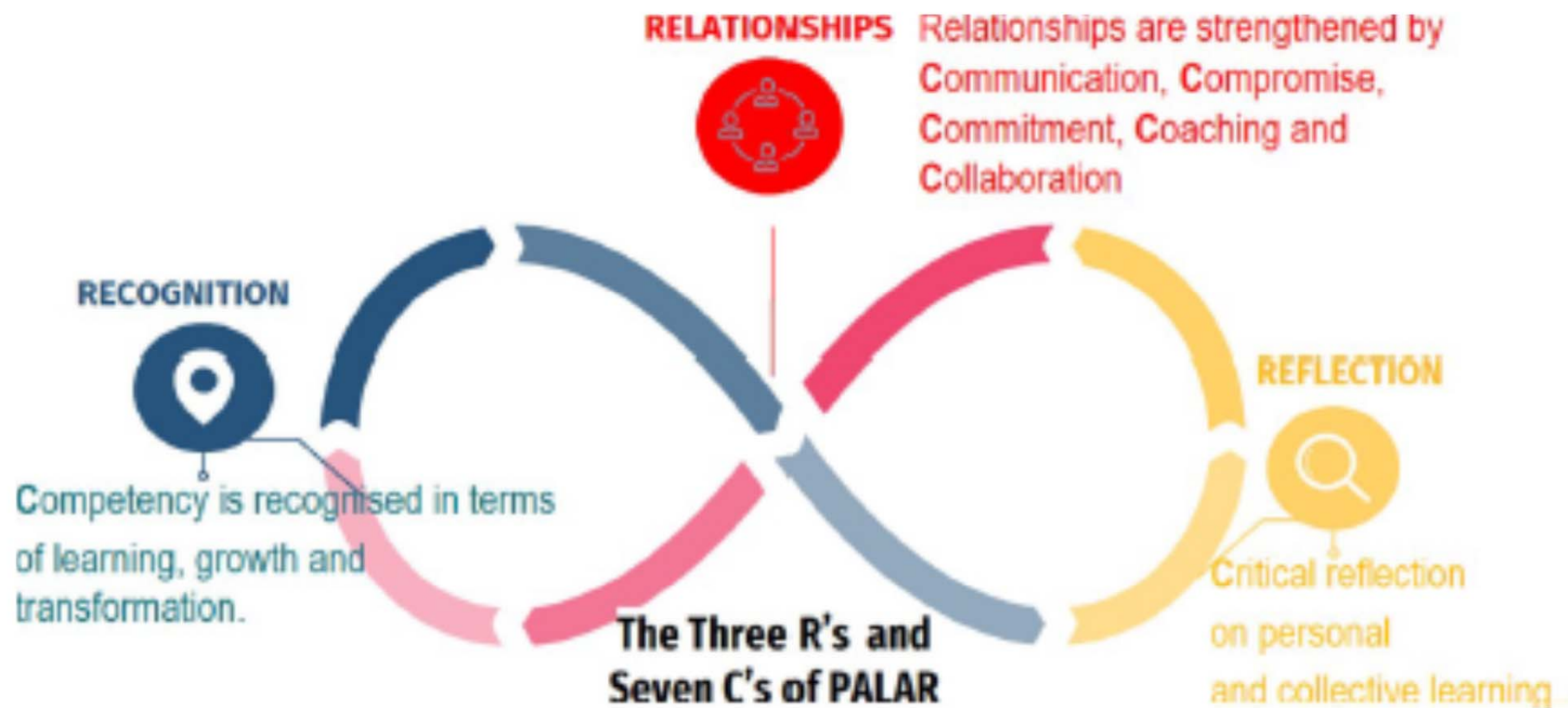
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# THE PALAR PRINCIPLES?



# THE PRINCIPLES OF PALAR



# RESEARCH PROBLEM

The problem being addressed in this study is the prevalence of traditional instructional methods in university settings, specifically within initial teacher education, which may not effectively promote sustainable learning. Traditional methods often lack the dynamic and reflective components necessary to prepare future teachers to be lifelong learners and adaptable professionals in a constantly evolving educational landscape. The study suggests that adopting Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) could be a paradigm for pedagogical transformation, providing a more effective approach to fostering sustainable learning. However, PALAR has primarily been utilised as a research design, and its potential as a teaching paradigm for changing pedagogical practices remains underexplored.

# AIM OF THE STUDY

The study also aims to highlight the potential of PALAR principles—such as dialogue, critical reflection, collaboration, experiential learning, and inclusion of diverse perspectives—as a paradigm for pedagogical transformation. Through self-reflection and action research, I intend to improve my teaching practice, thereby contributing to the development of students as sustainable learners in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

# **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY?**



# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Learning is a process where knowledge is presented to us, then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection



# SELF-STUDY RESEARCH

The research question investigated was: How did I transform my pedagogical practice following using PALAR in my scholarship? Self-study is an emerging research design that encourages educators to improve their professional practice by reflecting on and analysing their pedagogical approaches (Kortjass, 2020; Loughran, 2007; Pithouse-Morgan, 2022). Dinkelman (2003, p.57) states that self-study is not the entirety of teaching, but it “mirrors and systemises that part of pedagogy that is reflection”. By self-reflection, individuals can learn more about themselves and identify areas where they can improve (Campbell, 2017). Hence, self-reflection is imperative in self-study, as I need to reflect on my past experiences to contemplate and change my present pedagogy.



# **DATA GENERATION**

MEMORY DRAWINGS

INPUT FROM MY CRITICAL FRIENDS

STUDENT REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

# MEMORY DRAWINGS



Using memory drawings enables me to develop an awareness of how my past shaped my present practice. At a deeper level, I needed to turn the mirror inward and reflect on my current worldview that shaped my pedagogical decisions (Mortari, 2015). This raised my awareness of the dissonance between my beliefs and my actual practice (Hummelbrunner, 2015). This includes examining my *ontological* beliefs regarding truth and reality and my *epistemological* beliefs concerning what constitutes valid knowledge and how valid knowledge is constructed (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

✚ *Traditional teaching approach versus PALAR*

<b>Traditional Teaching (My Memory Drawing)</b>	<b>PALAR for Pedagogical Transformation</b>
The educator is an <b>authority figure</b> positioned as the source of knowledge or as the knower	PALAR facilitators recognise all voices, and participants engage in dialogue
The students sit <b>passively</b> , listen attentively and follow the educator's instructions.	PALAR is action research where all participants are <b>actively engaged</b> .
The classroom is <b>orderly</b> and arranged in neat rows.	PALAR is cyclic, non-linear and often 'disorderly' of ' <b>messy</b> .'
All learners are assumed to be a <b>homogenous</b> group.	<b>Diversity</b> is not only accommodated but celebrated
The educator follows <b>a predictable curriculum</b>	<b>PALAR cannot be predicted</b> as each cycle of inquiry is iterative and shaped by the reflections of the group
<b>Time constraints</b> are in place	<b>PALAR requires time</b> , as people need to build relationships with each other
<b>Cognition</b> and the learning of content are highlighted	PALAR promotes a more <b>holistic</b> approach focusing on all aspects of being human (head, heart and hands)
Opportunities to <b>connect</b> socially are limited in the classroom, as students are expected to listen and complete the tasks set out for	<b>Relationships</b> are the key to the success of a PALAR project and <u>social connection</u> is a requirement

# REFLECTIONS FROM CRITICAL FRIENDS

## CF 1

*PALAR encourages a two-way communication between students and lecturers to build and share their knowledge. For this to happen we need to listen to the students voices and where they are coming from.*

## CF 2

*I think what is being emphasised by PALAR is that we need to recognise that our students are human – they are people with feelings. We should not forget that when we are teaching them.*



# STUDENT REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

## Student 1

*For me - not just sitting there – makes all the difference in this class. Doing something – applying what we learn is important.*

## Student 2

*Solving problems and linking this module to our lives improved my understanding of the module.*





# CONCLUSION

This study argues that imbibing the principles of PALAR in teaching promotes sustainable learning. This is because adopting the PALAR approach to my teaching promoted dialogue and epistemic justice, cultivated relationships, facilitated experiential learning, encouraged active engagement and deepened students' learning, which would enable them to sustain their learning as future change agents in their classrooms and communities.

Furthermore, **self-study can further enhance PALAR by enabling critical awareness and self-reflection, leading to individual transformation.** By embracing research methodologies that foster positive change and sustainable learning in initial teacher education, students are equipped to become lifelong learners who may make a positive impact in their classrooms and beyond.