ALARj

Action learning and action research journal

Volume 29 No 1 October 2023

Action Learning and Action Research Journal

Vol 29 No 1 October 2023

Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd (and its predecessors) has published the ALAR Journal since 1996.

Editorial inquiries:

The Editor, *ALAR Journal*

Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd

PO Box 162, Greenslopes, Qld 4120 Australia

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ISSN 1326-964X (Print) ISSN 2206-611X (Online)

The Action Learning and Action Research Journal is listed in:

- Australian Research Council – *Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018 Journal List*
- Australian Business Deans Council - *2019 ABDC Journal Quality List*
- Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills - *Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers*

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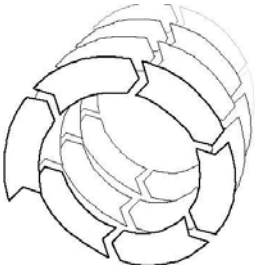

ALAR Journal

Volume 29 No 1
October 2023

ISSN 1326-964X (Print)
ISSN 2206-611X (Online)

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Editorial

Greetings,

Welcome to the latest issue of the *Action Learning and Action Research Journal* (*ALARj*). Within the pages of this journal, you will encounter a rich tapestry of research, perspectives, and real-world applications, all showcasing the transformative potential of Action Learning and Action Research in various contexts.

Last year, we proposed Thesis Research Notes (TRN) to assist researchers in getting early exposure for their future publication, and in this issue, we feature a TRN paper. We are also introducing a new and exciting initiative – the Thoughtlet. These papers are short (usually under 2,000 words) discussions on a specific topic by a highly regarded Action Learning / Action Research practitioner or academic.

The first article, *'Research makes me strong': An Oriental perspective towards using an autoethnographic approach*, by Tamiko Kondo, focuses on the benefits of action research practitioners writing an autoethnographic. In her prologue, Kondo provides a background to her decision to explore an autoethnographic approach. In the next section of her paper, the author describes and explains autoethnography using a relevant literature review. Kondo realized

> These accounts have explained to me how, through writing autoethnography, one could create a dialogue relationship between the personal and the cultural and connect them through multiple layers of consciousness." (p. 21).

Next, the author links this approach with action research by interviewing a former colleague researcher. On page 23, Kondo demonstrates this linkage by using a table describing how her interviewee used autoethnography throughout the action research

cycles. The author's epilogue consists of her answers to four key questions reflecting on what she learned through this meaningful experience. Kondo encourages researchers to explore this approach and allow it to help them 'negotiate' their identities to promote their self-growth.

Similar to the first article, the second one in this issue employs reflection and self-exploration. Carolyn Parker's paper *'What conditions enable senior white women to show up as anti-racist in their organization?'* addresses the topics of race, racism, and anti-racism using four inquiry cycles by the author and five other white women seniors from different organizations. After explaining the background and the personal root cause for this inquiry, the author provided a context of recent events in the United States that motivated and moved her to act. Parker's literature review examined race, racism, anti-racism, and womanhood in detail. Her thorough review shared definitions and various perspectives on the four issues. The author then explains the significance of employing action research as her methodology, her process to recruit co-inquirers, and her cycle of inquiries and research analysis.

Parker's findings consist of five conditions she identified with her inquiry group: knowledge and confidence; having a platform; organizational context; living with discomfort and our personal risks appetites; and a reflective space and support. Each of the five conditions adds another layer to this process. She concluded with a strong message encouraging white women to act with a supportive network of people who share the same commitment:

> … white women who wish to show up as antiracist take the time to ensure they fully understand what they are entering into, have an awareness of how this might affect them and the strategies they can deploy so as not to be derailed… they commit fully to developing their own understanding of race and racism together with a critical examination of what it means to be white in their particular context (p. 48)

Just as the second article addressed the issue of race, focusing on white senior white women and their learning experience, the third

article, *Participatory Action Learning and Action Research for inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education*, by Ashnie Mahadew, examined the issue of race from a different perspective focusing on the younger generation. It explored the topic of inclusion in South Africa using Participatory Action Learning and Action Research design (PALAR).

The author claimed that there are still incidents of discrimination and exclusion of marginalized groups with identity markers within schools. The group of participants that she formed included an early childhood care and education (ECCE) university researcher, six ECCE teachers, and two ECCE teacher trainers. These participants were able to present different perspectives throughout their collaborative study when they examined this challenging issue of discrimination and exclusion.

Mahadew provided a detailed background of the ECCE and described and explained the inclusion in it. Then, she shared her personal interest in the three topics: Inclusion, ECCE, and PALAR. This thorough narrative gives the readers another layer and a deeper understanding of this study, highlighting the Head, Heart, and Hands Model as a holistic approach to education and learning. '…the use of this model (figure 1) resonated with my background as an early-years teacher seeking a more holistic representation of learning and research' (p. 67). The article has a section sharing various reflections from the study.

> I am now aware about the differences children have, and how to meet the needs of different children. It gave me lot of understanding when it comes to different people and how to deal with them without treating them in a way that will feel unwelcome or as if they are different from other people. This gave me the understanding of how to speak using other types of language that will not offend another person or hurt other people's feels [feelings]. It contributed positive feelings and gave me enough knowledge about diverse children with diverse needs. Now I am able to work with children and I have good understanding of diversity and inclusion (Kaveri) (p. 73)

Each of the reflections indicates a different learning experience; however, all of them signify the importance of this study. Mahadew hopes that her article, which presented a smaller segment of a more extensive study, could help teachers enhance their knowledge and skills in understanding the value of inclusion in ECCE.

The fourth paper in this issue is our first Thesis Research Notes entitled *Supporting the sustainable development of Mexico: an investigation into the reorientation of undergraduate industrial design curriculum*. The Thesis Research Notes (TRN) initiative invites authors to submit their papers in order to gain early exposure. The TRN focuses on the researcher's journey and would usually be co-authored with the thesis supervisor, who would add insights and another perspective of this research process. *ALARj* is not seeking a scaled-down paper on the masters or doctoral thesis that the candidate has submitted and successfully passed. The intent is an informative paper that directly refers to and links to the author's thesis to 'whet the reader's appetite' to consider downloading and reading it as well as to gain an appreciation of the HDR candidate's research journey and motivation to choose the research topic and to maintain interest over the many years taken to complete the research.

The TRN by Núñez López et al. (including the research supervision team) shared the doctoral thesis employing Action Research as the primary methodology. The authors found a need to support the sustainable development of an undergraduate curriculum in Mexico. The newly designed curriculum underwent multiple Action Research cycles, leading to a successful implementation.

The authors identified a gap addressing two facets of the undergraduate curriculum: creating practical digital tools and accessible information resources for Spanish-speaking students and citizens. The researchers designed a curriculum aligned with those needs. The article concludes with the doctoral candidate's reflection on her study and her supervisors' reflections on their roles in this process.

> Candidate's reflections
>
> I undertook the doctoral programme as a part time student. This mode of study turned out to valuable as it created the possibility for me to investigate the Industrial Design curriculum at TEC, at the same time as undertaking my role as a professor and a parent (p. 96)
>
> Supervisors' reflections on the candidature
>
> Supervising an action research inquiry brings the added challenge, but also advantage, that elements of the research are unpredictable. As such, action research requires collaborators to constantly revisit their ideas about how to achieve the objectives, which at different moments in the research, are perceived be important to achieve (p. 97)

Both reflections highlight the significance of this type of paper – Thesis Research Notes.

ALARA invites all interested researchers and authors to take part in this initiative. Please contact me if you wish to discuss this type of paper.

Our last contribution is another new initiative: a 'Thoughtlet'. Rather than the typical definition of a thoughtlet as a small and insignificant thought, our intention of this type of contribution is to seek the thoughts of a very experienced practitioner or academic on a single, specific topic in the Action Learning / Action Research field, thereby generating discussion on that topic. ALARA welcomes feedback on the concept and the thoughtlets published, and of course, contributions.

Our first Thoughtlet comes from Bob Dick, well-known in AL / AR communities. Dick discusses the theoretical and practical framework of Action Science and its implications to Action Learning and Action Research.

> The Action Science framework links together within-person, between-person and system dynamics. It is driven by our inner assumptions and motivations interacting with our external actions as we relate to others (p. 103).

He then explores the development of "theories of action" by Argyris and Schön, which they labelled "Model I" and "Model II", and in later works, as "Model O-I" and "Model O-II". Roger Schwarz substituted these labels with unilateral control and mutual learning. Dick also briefly describes further work by Argyris, such as the ladder of interference and undiscussibility of assumptions made by people in a work or social situation. He finishes with two ideas that build on this work.

As you can see, action learning and action research cross continents, fields of study, and people in different cultures and generations, intending to bring a positive change impacting all.

To Lifelong Learning,

Yedida Bessemer, EdD

ALARj 29 (1) (2023) 13-28

‘Research makes me strong’: An Oriental perspective towards using an autoethnographic approach

Tamiko Kondo

Abstract

Having received critical comments from academic journal reviewers, the Author reflects on herself and her practices, which led to her thinking back to the start of her career as an Action Researcher and exploring ways to study herself and hence what it means to write an autoethnography. The exploration included a relevant literature review, which suggested to her that its writing process may inevitably lead authors to be engaged in the negotiation of their own identity, and an interview with a former colleague who has attempted to use autoethnography in her Action Research (AR) practice. The Author claims writing an autoethnography could help us negotiate our own identities through shuttling between them and through a dialogic relationship with ourselves, which is why it may be worth incorporating autoethnography into an AR practice. Most notably, the colleague’s word, which is that research made her strong, may mean everything to the Author.

Key words: Autoethnography, Action Research, language ideologies, identity negotiation

ALARj 29 (1) (2023) 13-28 © 2023 Action Learning, Action Research Association Ltd

What is known about the topic?

Autoethnography can be used as a method in reflective practice.

What does this paper add?

This paper adds the possibility of incorporating autoethnography into an AR practice and its significance.

Who will benefit from its content?

Any of those who are engaged with reflective practice as well as those who practise Action Research.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

The researcher is part of the research.

Received *April 2020* *Reviewed* *June 2020*

Revised *March 2022* *Reviewed* *August 2022* *Published* *October 2023*

Prologue

> I want to be able to imagine what was done and how so that I can, if I wanted to, conduct a similar study … I noticed that the author uses 'I' quite often. If this was a collaboration, which the word 'group' implies, I wonder if we can hear any other voices in this report? (Reviewer, personal communication, March 13, 2019)
>
> There is an emphasis on what happened and how it happened during the AR [action research] process but hardly anything on the 'why'. As such, the narrative is superficial … AR is at its most powerful when conflicts and non-mutual understandings are brought to the surface, debated and resolved … The point is that this is where learning and change occur and should not be glossed over or wished away. Was this to do with cultural inhibition on the part of the students or through the effect of unequal power relations between teacher and students? (Reviewer, personal communication, May 26, 2020)

These are extracted from the reviewers' comments on two pieces of my writing which I previously submitted to two different academic journals. The first was taken from a review on a paper of mine which I had submitted to the proceedings of an international conference on language teaching held in Japan in 2018. In the

paper I explained the process by which some Japanese English language teachers, including myself, developed our understanding of communicative competence. I understand communicative competence, which is one of the topics raised in my PhD study conducted between 2014-2018, as being 'how we can effectively communicate with others so as to reach mutual understanding' (Kondo, 2018).

The second extract was from a comment on my paper submitted to the *Action Learning and Action Research Journal* based on my presentation at the CARN-ALARA Conference in Croatia in 2019. Having started my new professional career at a university in Japan after working at junior high schools for years, I attempted to explain in the paper how my students and I developed our communicative competence as I saw it, through working together. Both comments indicate the papers were superficial, although only the second one uses the word 'superficial', and questions if I actually collaborated with other people and if there were no conflicts among those involved due to 'unequal power relations'. This can be read to mean that the paper led the reviewer to speculate even cultural differences between myself (a Japanese and non-native English user) and themself (possibly a native English speaker with a Western background) as a possible reason why conflicts and non-mutual understandings were not brought to the surface. I do not think such strong cultural inhibition exists in our society as well as on the part of students. Although I felt confused when seeing the phrase 'cultural inhibition' in the comment, I wrote the paper that led the reviewer to come up with its possibility. The reviewers' comments above reminded me of something that my first supervisor often told me, when I was doing my PhD study, to 'write at an explanatory level, which means giving reasons and purposes for [my] actions' in order that readers don't have to work things out for themselves (J. McNiff, personal communication, August 10, 2014). McNiff (2013) explains what it means to 'write for a reader' and 'write like a reader' as follows:

> Develop the capacity of writing for a reader … The only thing they know about you is what they read on the page … To write like a reader, practise putting yourself in your reader's shoes and reading your own work with a critical eye, or perhaps ask someone who is unfamiliar with your work to read it for you, or even to you (McNiff, 2013, p. 152).

The reviewers' comments above clearly showed me that I had not learned from my own experience, which must be taken seriously if I call myself a researcher.

I would like to make clear that it is not my intention to make excuses for my clumsy pieces of writing nor to argue against those reviewers in this paper. However, they did motivate me to consider the future course of my practice as a teacher and a researcher. It was while I was considering this that I came across two things that got me thinking.

The first was an article published in the *Educational Action Research Journal* (Pinner, 2018) in which the author attempted to 'gain a better understanding of [his] own experience which [he] had already begun to mythologise through [his] own narrative research in other articles' (p. 94). The author uses the term 'mythologising' as follows:

> to describe a potentially negative process of moving away from a verifiable or "valid" account of the course through retellings which were not part of evidence-based reflection, as oppose to the "re-storying" process advocated in quality narrative research (Pinner, 2018, p. 92).

In this attempt, the author conducted 'a kind of "archaeological excavation" of the perceived reality' of his best course he has ever taught since he was afraid that '[his] perception of its success was based on untested assumptions' (pp. 91-95). Autoethnography was used as a method, which he concludes helped him 'take stock of a formative professional experience before it becomes obscured by the process of mythologising it' and therefore helps us 'develop as reflective professionals' (Pinner 2018, p. 103). I got interested in this article partly because I also have a class which I like to think is

the best I have ever taught and for which I won the University Professor of the Year 2019 in recognition of being highly rated in an institutional course evaluation survey by my students. Although this class award was different from the one I picked up for my presentation at the CARN-ALARA Conference in 2019, Pinner's (2018) autoethnographic study led me to wonder if my success in a certain class might have obscured what I had to reconsider about my practices and thus prevented me learning from them. The study also resulted in my learning that I could try to use an autoethnographic approach and similarly embark on an archaeological excavation of the perceived reality of my practices as the next step.

The second thing that got me thinking was the webpage of a Japanese researcher in the same field as me - English language education and applied linguistics. The researcher wrote that he did not recognise the meaning in separating teaching from doing research, since he was researching himself as a teacher and his students he was teaching. Unfortunately, I could not find the source or the name of the researcher, which I much regret. What was written on the webpage reminded me of my presentation at the Postgraduate Research Methodologies Conference in 2014 in the early days of my PhD study. The last presentation slide says, 'I am studying MYSELF in company with other people, exploring who I am as a teacher and a teacher educator' (Kondo, 2014). This was inspired by a conversation with my first supervisor who had suddenly asked me, 'Who are you studying?' I got confused by the unexpected question and gave her several answers, such as research participants, education policy, and teacher education methodology, but she gave a nod to none of these. I then had an idea and suggested, 'Myself?' She smiled. This was a crucial conversation which has remained embedded in my memory. Nevertheless, I was not able to find its date or any notes about it in my journal notebook, which must also be taken seriously. I should record such experiences to get back to for re-evaluation. I realised this through Pinner (2018), explaining we can still investigate an experience 'despite the length of time that has passed since it took place' (p. 103). He recalls that he has 'always engaged in a process

of collecting classroom data with the intention of somehow turning it into a publishable piece of research' (p. 103), which has led to his keeping a massive amount of information. He recognises no '"sell by date"' or '"publish-by-date"' for data (p. 103). This led me to reflect on my practice and reconsider whether I might have tried to rush presenting and publishing my work without enough careful examination of the data and believed that 'there is a certain "sell-by-date" to data collected as part of classroom research' (Pinner, 2018, p. 103). I am wondering if this attitude of mine, this not 'conducting a kind of "archaeological excavation" of the perceived reality' (Pinner, 2018, p. 95), might have led to the reviewers' comments above.

Having said that, I have always reflected and re-reflected on my practices, which has informed my further practices, although it is difficult for me to show the evidence since I have found it hard to keep a reflective journal in my busy daily life (which I do recognise is the point that has to be reconsidered). Now I ask myself the same question which my first supervisor asked me: who am I studying? These days I can answer without hesitation: 'Myself'. I have returned to the same place after several years, and now I feel much better in answering like this. Because I have arrived here by myself this time, I feel I can see the future direction of my research practice.

Around the same time, I came up with the idea of interviewing a former colleague of mine from the time when I was doing my PhD study, who has written up her dissertation about her attempt to use autoethnography in an AR project. Her considerable efforts and her tenacity in research have always inspired me and aroused my interest and led me to do a literature review on autoethnography (see the next section) before interviewing her.

I hope I have been able to clearly explain so far how the above-mentioned reviewers' comments have motivated me to consider the future course of my practice as a teacher and a researcher. This paper is the story of my exploration of autoethnography and of what it means to write using an autoethnographic approach in an AR practice. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality,

the name of the colleague, who readily consented to me interviewing her and including what I learnt from the interview in a paper, is a pseudonym (Ling).

Autoethnography

In this section, I overview how autoethnography is explained in the relevant literature. As a former secondary school English language teacher and currently a university lecturer in English language education and applied linguistics, as well as being engaged with pre/in-service teacher education, I mainly review works written by academics in the same field. First, Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (p. 739). Loo (2017) categorizes the genre and explains two kinds of autoethnography, 'analytic' and 'evocative', as follows. Due to the characteristics of evocative autoethnography, which includes aiming to 'deliver a narrative accessible to a larger and more varied audience' (p. 46), not only for scholars or academics, it is 'too personal, hence less trustworthy and unscientific' (p. 45). It depends 'heavily on personal subjectivity' and can be challenged on 'its immediate worth in light of established knowledge' (p. 49). On the other hand, analytic autoethnography 'aims to maintain the rigor of traditional social science research', and its stories are investigated 'in light of professional communities and theoretical frameworks' (p. 45). After attempts to use these two approaches, Loo (2017) favours analytic autoethnography, in that it 'supports a dialogic relationship between personal experiences with broader theoretical constructs', 'positions teachers as critical and systematic thinkers', and 'may be more successful in ensuring the confidentiality of participants being examined' (p. 57). Loo (2017) led me to look at Canagarajah (2012). I have often referred to Canagarajah in my previous writing. My sympathy with Canagarajah's works may come from the fact that I have been a non-native English language teacher in Japan, although Japan differs from Sri Lanka, where Canagarajah came from, in that English is taught as a foreign language in Japan but is used widely

and officially in Sri Lanka. Canagarajah first gives an etymological explanation of autoethnography: ''*auto*' as 'the point of view of the self', '*ethno*' as our 'socially constructed' experiences and development, and '*graphy*' as narratives 'the creative resources of writing'' (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260, emphasis in original). As 'a periphery professional in TESOL' (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the US (p. 262), Canagarajah admits to 'tensions in the diverse identities one enjoys that may never be resolved', which however 'can lead to forms of negotiation that generate critical insights and in-between identities' (p. 261); this discussion is also noticed by Loo (2017). In this context, Jones (2005) encourages us to '*[r]ecognize the power of the in-between*' and to insist on 'the interaction of message and aesthetics, process and product, the individual and the social' (p. 784, emphasis in original). Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain when writers '*zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition*' (p. 739, emphasis in original). Canagarajah (2012) also claims 'a resistant dimension to autoethnography' in that 'storytelling is not politically innocent' (p. 261). Overall, Canagarajah views autoethnography as

> a valuable form of knowledge construction in our field, as TESOL professionals in diverse communities can use this genre to represent their professional experiences and knowledge in a relatively less threatening academic manner (p. 262).

Similarly, Yazan (2019), who is originally from Turkey and has contended with the idea of '"nativeness" that has been part of the dominant language ideologies' (p. 42) in our field, uses 'language ideologies as a conceptual lens in [his] narrative to interrupt [his] experiences negotiating identities as a language user, teacher, and teacher educator' (p. 34). Valuing the process of writing autoethnography, Yazan (2019) describes how writing the autoethnography and his 'identity negotiation' as teacher educator are never finished (p. 51). It may be noted that both Loo (2017) and Yazan (2019) refer to the difficulty of selecting stories or narratives as a challenge in autoethnography writing. On this point, Loo

(2017) is concerned about being recognised as 'cherry picking' (p. 57). Yazan explains that it was difficult partly because of contemplating which identity to act out through the narrative (2019, p. 51). Finally, Wall (2008), a study outside the TESOL field, in an autoethnography about international adoption, mentions '"objectivity", data quality, legitimacy and ethics' as challenges in autoethnography writing (p. 39), and takes up the following intriguing points. The attempt to 'avoid emotion and defensiveness' to gain objectivity led to her undermining the aims of her autoethnography writing (p.44). Wall (2008) further recalls:

> In an effort to help me defend my work, my supervisory committee asked me to justify my strategy of using memories as data. It seems that unless data about personal experience are collected and somehow transformed by another researcher, they fail to qualify as legitimate (p. 45).

I felt a sense of closeness to the author, maybe because I thought this might explain the difficulty that Action Researchers may feel in their practices. Wall's practices to 'assess the quality and potential contribution of [her] narrative' (2008, p. 46) include seeking feedback from her academic mentor and thinking about her writing in the light of the questions offered by Ellis (2000), which Ellis asks herself when 'evaluating narrative ethnographies' (p. 273). Jones (2005) also asks us to 'consider how our autoethnographic texts do not stand, speak, or act alone; are not texts alone; and do not want to be left alone' (p. 783). This gave me a useful idea on how to review my writing before submitting it to someone, which I will practise later in this paper.

These accounts have explained to me how, through writing autoethnography, one could create a dialogic relationship between the personal and the cultural and connect them through multiple layers of consciousness. Through its process, one may be inevitably engaged in the negotiation of his/her own identity, which might cause some degree of tension, since storytelling is not politically innocent, as Canagarajah (2012) explains. It may sound reasonable since 'languages are in such close existence to us' and hence 'language itself can be easily linked with ideology' (Torikai et al.,

2017, p. 103, author's translation). On reflection, as a non-native English language teacher and a former international student in a Western country, I may have always been engaged in identity negotiation within myself as well as meaning negotiation in the setting of communication. Canagarajah (2014) explains the attitude of being open to negotiation as one's 'language awareness' and which is part of one's communicative competence (p. 91). Navigating through the tensions, which may arise through the negotiation, could enable us to enhance our sensitivity to language, our identities and the world around us. How to theorize the writing of autoethnography also suggests to me a possible idea of combining autoethnography into the AR methodology. This sounds meaningful, considering the purpose of AR is '(1) to generate new knowledge, which (2) feeds into new theory' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 14). In the next section, I will explain my exploration of autoethnography, reflecting on the interview with Ling.

What it means to write an autoethnography in an Action Research practice

In this section, I will reflect on the interview with Ling and what I learned from it. As mentioned above, Ling is a former colleague of mine from when I was doing my PhD study in the UK. She started her PhD study when I was in my third year. Because we had so much in common - being English teaching professionals, coming from Asia, studying AR, working with supervisors from the UK and going back and forth between a home country and the UK - we often talked with each other about not only our research stories but also daily life issues as international students living abroad. Having stayed in touch after I left the UK, I occasionally had the chance to hear from her about how she was managing to complete her PhD while going through so much. The pandemic occurred right about that time, which made her life even more difficult. Although her story sometimes broke my heart, each time I could not help feeling admiration for her tenacity, strength and intelligence. I conducted a semi-structured style of interview with

her which was recorded for later analysis via Zoom in December 2021. Table 1 shows the course of events as to how she came to use autoethnography in her AR project:

Table 1. *The course of events as to how Ling came to use autoethnography in her action research project*

How she learned about action research	Became a research participant in an AR project done by American colleagues at her home university. She then paid an academic visit to a UK university to explore how to do AR, which led to her deciding to do her PhD study at another UK university
The purpose of her PhD research	To help her colleagues at her home university learn AR through working together in her AR project, including three cycles of action research; action research tended to be seen just as a report, not a theory or a methodology, to summarize somebody else's experiences and to make teaching more effective at her home university
The first AR cycle	Went well in that she found AR was useful and that research participants showed their interest in it as a methodology, which was something new to them
The second AR cycle	Realized difficulties in achieving the purpose of her research, such as geographical difficulty, time difference and the research participants' difficulties in making time for her research because of their teaching commitments and family responsibilities, and hence resulted in collecting an insufficient amount of data
The third AR cycle	In order to make her AR project available, decided to use an autoethnography, in which her main supervisor was well versed, and hence the third cycle became her personal account

During the interview, Ling mentioned a crucial supervision meeting where she tried to analyse the reason why her original intention had failed. She then found that she regarded herself as a teacher or a learner rather than a researcher during the first two AR cycles and decided that she was going to look at the issue by positioning herself as a researcher. This reflects Oyama's (2017) discussion that autoethnography can 'make possible back-and-forth practice where someone becomes aware of his/her positionality and views themself from the newly realised position' (p. 81, author's translation). Ling further explains that she decided to make a reflective account in the third AR cycle:

> to analyse how I change in my ideas about myself, how I change my perceptions about research, and how I'm going to continue to work as a researcher. (Ling, personal communication, December 29, 2021)

Referring to her personal unhappiness, including an unhappy marriage, she continues:

> part of the reason [why I was determined to continue to do the research] was that I wanted to explain to my readers that I didn't give it up … my wisdom comes from my personal experiences … my professional life is connected with my personal life, and I think my professional identity is there and my cultural identities are also there. So in order to analyse my cultural identities, I want to talk about how I've lived my life … that's why I use autoethnography … the final conclusion is that by connecting the research with my personal life, I find that I'm in fact trying to find out the meaning of life. I think what made me become so strong and what makes me quite so persevering and so resilient … was because I realised that it was meaningful for me. (Ling, personal communication, December 29, 2021)

She then clearly said that she had changed - her view about research and the meaning of her own life had changed and it had made a difference. I found myself saying, 'Your thesis is beautiful, it sounds very beautiful!'. Thus, she simply answered my question, as written in the prologue, as to what it means to write an autoethnography in an AR practice.

As explained, in the third AR cycle Ling used autoethnography as a research methodology in order to study herself, and also used it as a method to talk about her personal life and how she was encouraged to continue to develop her professional career. She further stressed that it was the same as AR in that it is not only a method but also a theory. It may be worth incorporating autoethnography into an AR practice since it could help us negotiate our own identities through shuttling between them and through a dialogic relationship with oneself. We could say it can therefore contribute to researchers' growth. At any rate, what she said to me about research making her strong, may prove to mean everything to me.

Epilogue

As I mentioned above, I will review this piece of writing by answering some questions posed by Ellis (2000, p. 275).

'Is there anything "new" here or a new way to view or twist the familiar?'

The idea itself of using autoethnography as a method and a theoretical framework in an AR practice was new to me, and it has motivated me to (co)-construct an idea of the AR methodology combined with an autoethnographic approach. Writing this piece has also made me aware of the similarities between practising action research and writing an autoethnography, which I have never thought about.

'[D]oes the story ring true, is it lifelike?'

I hope I was able to 'represent the chaos' (p. 275) within myself through referring to the reviewers' comments in the opening of the Prologue and my response to them, and provide 'a readable and understandable experience' (p. 275) in terms of the issue of what/who I am studying. I also appreciate the real-life conversation with my colleague, in which I see 'individual and collective meaning-making processes' (Kondo, 2018) and feel very happy about being engaged in the process.

'Did the author know the end of the story when she started or does writing become a form of inquiry?'

I hope I was able to 'show, instead of tell' (p. 275) the events that led up to my exploring the meaning of autoethnography and what it means to write an autoethnography in an AR practice while reviewing relevant literature and real-life spoken data. Furthermore, writing this piece of paper has helped me view myself as a researcher. Now I feel I have reached the starting line of exploring AR as a researcher.

'What might readers take from the story? Will this story help others cope with or better understand their worlds? Is it useful, and if so, for whom?'

In my PhD thesis (Kondo, 2018), as an interdisciplinary study, I explain the powerful combination of AR as methodology and critical applied linguistics as discipline, as follows:

> Applied linguists may clearly benefit from adopting self-reflective practices … through reflection on themselves as well as the people that they are researching, they might develop sensitivity about how they were exercising their influence on the dialogue, such as when negotiating with stakeholders. Conversely, using an applied linguistic approach might help action researchers develop sensitivity to the dialogic context which they are inevitably influencing. (Kondo, 2018)

Similarly, I would like to say that the story in this paper could make Action Researchers more conscious of their identities as language users, of how they negotiate their identities, how we are influencing each other in actual dialogic contexts, and the fact that we all take responsibility for those dialogic contexts. Becoming aware of these could make a difference in practising AR. I would say all Action Researchers could benefit from writing an autoethnography.

Overall, I look forward to further exploration, which I hope could lead to my growth as a researcher.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to my good and respectable friend (Ling), as a person, a teacher and an Action Researcher, who has always inspired me and made me feel admiration for her intelligence, sincerity and tenacity. It has been an honour to meet her and work with and learn from her. I am so grateful to her for giving me this very productive and fruitful time to explore the wonderful method and methodology.

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Biography

Tamiko Kondo, from Japan, has international experience which includes teaching in Belgium and completing her PhD study in the UK, and is currently a lecturer in English language education and applied linguistics at University of the Ryukyus, Japan. She has been practising Action Research since her master's study as a teacher educator. In her recent project, she has been working with local school teachers towards a smooth transition from primary to junior high school English class.

ALARj 29 (1) (2023) 29-54

What conditions enable senior, white women to show up as anti-racist in their organisations?

Carolyn Parker

Abstract

This study seeks to explore the conditions that enable senior, white women to show up as antiracist in their organisations by utilising an Action Research methodology, specifically Cooperative Inquiry.

Over the course of four inquiry cycles the author and her co-inquirers, five other senior, white women from different organisations, explored the inquiry question "What conditions enable senior, white women to show up as antiracist in their organisations?" in conversation and via shared journaling, reflecting on the actions that they were able to take and the conditions that enabled those actions or hindered them. In collaboration, we identified five conditions, namely:

- *Knowledge and confidence*
- *Having a platform*
- *Organisational context*
- *Living with discomfort and personal risk appetite*
- *Reflective space and support*

This paper concludes with a discussion of the practical implications and recommendations derived from the research.

Key words: Antiracism, Action Research, race, cooperative inquiry

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What is known about the topic?

As beneficiaries of a racialised society, white people have an integral role in anti-racism work, which requires reflexivity and being the change.

What does this paper add?

The paper explores the specific role of white women in contributing to anti-racist practice in organisations, and underlines the significance of an inquiry question to shaping leadership practice and third-order change.

Who will benefit from its content?

Leaders, OD practitioners and academics interested in the theory and practice of anti-racism.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

The paper emphasises the importance of establishing co-inquirers to sustain focus, practice and courage. It also demonstrates the potential to generate depth of insight with short, focused cycles of inquiry.

Received February 2022 Reviewed December 2022 Published October 2023

Introduction

The inquiry question was borne out of the author's personal desire to move from listening and learning about race and racism, to taking action that would have a practical impact on racial equality in the spaces that the author occupied. In speaking with others, the author noticed a common theme amongst white people - that we didn't know what to say and we were afraid to get it wrong. The author became curious about why this was and what would enable a shift.

Originally, the research was submitted as part of a dissertation in part-fulfilment of the Master of Science in People and Organisational Development at Roffey Park Institute, which is located in the United Kingdom. However, the author believes this line of inquiry is both necessary and relevant to other practitioners and organisations.

This paper will turn to examine some of the key contextual factors that gave rise to this line of inquiry, before sharing the relevant literature within which the author's understanding of race, racism and anti-racism is situated. Next the paper will explore the

findings from this inquiry, before discussing the practical implications and limitations of the research.

Context

In 2020, a series of events took place that acted as a catalyst for this research. Within the space of four months three Black people were killed in America, two by police and all by white people. Their names were: Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed whilst out jogging in February 2020; Breonna Taylor, who was shot and killed by police who had mistakenly entered her home as she slept in March 2020; and George Floyd, who was killed in May 2020 by a police officer who knelt on his neck for over 9 minutes as George repeatedly said that he could not breathe. The last of these events was caught on camera. These deaths aren't the first of their kind, but they took place at the same time COVID-19 was becoming a global issue. The timing of the pandemic, the senseless nature of the murders, together with the irrefutable evidence of George Floyd's murder in particular, sparked a global conversation about race. This author, like other white people, was moved to act.

Literature review

Race

Whilst race is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as an objective and identifiable phenomenon, there has been much debate in the sociological, anthropological and geneticist fields as to whether it is a biological or social construct. For the purposes of this research, race is considered a social construct (Mitchell, 2012). That is to say, the variation that we see between people, which includes intelligence, physical characteristics, and personality traits, etc. that some may attribute to race (skin colour, nationality, or ethnicity), is not adequately accounted for in biological variation, nor do those differences show up consistently within and between races. We can instead then understand that the notion of race, if it is not biologically based, serves a different purpose and has been created thus. The notion of racial superiority and inferiority has

historically been advanced to support colonialism (HoSang, 2014). It served those who had power, and wished to capitalise on it, to propagate the notion of racial inferiority for anyone who was not white. It sought to legitimise abhorrent acts, creating a racial hierarchy, and instilling the idea that such acts were in the best interests of the very people most harmed by them. And that if it were not in their best interests, then it did not matter since it likely served the interests of white people who were superior and therefore any suffering was negated by the benefits to wider society and civilisation.

Omi and Winnant's (1986, pp. 183) definition speaks to this: 'race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies'.

Racism

Definitions and models of racism have been rightly criticised for over-emphasising individual prejudice, whilst underplaying the significance of power in the expression and impact of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). To address such concerns, Bonilla-Silva (1997, pp. 469) put forward the notion of racialized social systems, which he defined as: 'societies in which economic, political, social and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races'.

The placement of these actors in racial categories involves a hierarchy, in which the race placed at the top of the hierarchy and therefore considered "superior" generally enjoys benefits as a result of their placement. That is, they tend to have higher economic status, by undertaking better paid occupations and having greater access to job opportunities, hold a primary position in the political system and are more highly regarded socially (e.g., considered to be better looking, more intelligent and more law-abiding citizens). Certainly, in the UK we see differential outcomes for white people versus Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic[1]

1 In using the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic I recognise the limitations of language, and the relevant and warranted critiques that this terminology serves

communities. Runnymede (2021) reports Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people have higher levels of unemployment, are lower paid than their white counterparts for similar roles, are more likely to be excluded from school, experience health inequalities, and are over-represented in poor housing and homelessness. According to Bonilla-Silva (1997) this is evidence of a racialized social system, and the more dissimilar the life chances are, the more racialized the social system.

The nature of how this racial hierarchy can be seen and understood, as well as how it is upheld is open to change according to the prevailing economic, social, political, and ideological conditions at that time. And the corresponding behaviour and attitudes can be more, or less, overt, depending on the societal norms expressed. In this way, Bonilla-Silva's (1997) framework of racialized social systems acknowledges how and why the expression of racism can change over time and invites a more critical analysis than the mainstream idealist perspective on how a reduction in overt, racist behaviour does not necessarily equate with a reduction in racism in society. And importantly, Bonilla-Silva (1997) is explicit in his view that racist ideology, in and of itself, is not sufficient to create and uphold racial hierarchies, although it does play an important role at a collective rather than at an individual level consciously or otherwise.

Bonilla-Silva's (1997) theory of racialized social systems places an emphasis on what we might more commonly understand as institutional and structural or systemic racism. Institutional racism refers to the racism that is perpetuated by organisations and institutions through their policies and practices. It frequently does not explicitly set out to achieve racial disparity in its effect and outcomes but is rather a consequence of a failure to recognise a) that racism continues to be an issue, and therefore is within the

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to homogenise a diverse group of people and situate their identity in contrast to White people. However, this is terminology that is widely understood and readily used in the UK and as such I use it despite its limitations. With thanks to Shereen Daniels (2021) for the provocation to acknowledge this tension.

individuals who work in any given organisation, and b) that the decision makers in many of these organisations and institutions, who are responsible for setting policy, are disproportionately white (Ray, 2019).

Meanwhile, structural or systemic racism can be understood to be the ways in which racism at an institutional level interacts in such a way as to intensify racial inequalities. An example of structural or systemic racism relates to the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Haque et al. (2020) report that these communities have been over-represented in both severe illness and death caused by COVID-19. The report states that a key factor has been the barriers that these communities face in shielding because they are: over-represented in frontline roles, which cannot be undertaken from home; more likely to have to use public transport; and more likely to be living in multi-generational and overcrowded homes. A further contributory factor may be the reluctance of these communities to seek timely care, based on prior poor experience within the healthcare system (Public Health England, 2020). It is through this example that we see the interaction of multiple institutional domains including housing, education, employment, and healthcare. Each institutional domain alone wouldn't necessarily account for a disparity on the scale that it is reported, but together combine to create a significant racial inequality.

However, Bonilla-Silva (2015) acknowledged that his work had underplayed the importance of racist ideology at an individual level, and as such, I add the definitions of internalised and interpersonal racism to round out this section. Internalised racism relates to privately held beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices. Both white people and people of colour can experience internalised racism. For people of colour, it can manifest as internalised oppression, an acceptance at some level (conscious or unconscious) of the limitations and negative stereotypes that persist regarding their race. For white people, it manifests as a belief in the superiority of white people (Pyke, 2010). Meanwhile, interpersonal

racism is the expression of internalised racism between individuals, it makes the invisible, visible. This can be seen through micro-aggressions, which are often indirect, subtle, and sometimes unintentional manifestations of privately held beliefs and stereotypes. It can be seen in the issue of colourism that exists within communities of colour, where it is desirable to have a lighter skin tone over darker skin (Grant, 2020). And it could be more overt and conform to the notion of racism that many of us hold in our minds, for example the use of racial slurs (The Anti-Racist Educator, 2020).

Anti-racism

Anti-racism is the active expression, through words and actions, that an individual rejects racism and is an advocate for racial equality. It requires individuals to move beyond a passive 'not racist' stance, where racist ideas, behaviours and policies may go unchallenged, to one where people speak up and out about racism as active allies. Kendi (2019) draws a more direct distinction between being anti-racist versus not racist – noting that the latter is in fact racist, since through inaction an individual becomes complicit and colludes with the prevailing norm.

The active aim of being antiracist spoke to the active aim of this Action Research inquiry.

Womanhood

The initial interest in womanhood for this inquiry was related to the ways in which gender might shape the ability of the author and her co-inquirers to show up as antiracist in their organisations. However, the literature review demonstrated the intersection of gender and race in ways that influence racialised narratives, how white women have been used to amplify stereotypes to the detriment of Black women in particular, and the role that white women play in actively upholding white supremacy and weaponising their tears when white fragility is evoked (Hamad, 2020).

To legitimise the enslavement of Black and Brown people, they first had to be dehumanised and cast in a category of 'less than' in relation to their white counterparts. On one level there were common stereotypes for Black and Brown men and women. They were considered less intelligent, less civilised, and less attractive than their white counterparts (Golash-Boza, 2015). However, their dehumanisation was also gendered, with a particular focus on the subjugation of Black women in contrast to white women. bell hooks[2] (1987) sets out clearly how when enslaved Black women were expected to work in the fields and undertake the same physical labour as enslaved Black men, this served to stereotype them as masculine. And so, they found themselves 'lacking' in two ways, their race and their gender. Additionally, Black women were denoted as highly sexual, and lacking in the virtues and morals that were so becoming of white women.

When white women could no longer oppress Black and Brown people through enslavement, they relied on their femininity and the need to protect their chastity. Their delicacy and powerlessness were (and are) white women's strength, and they use it to invoke white men's anger directed at Black and Brown men (Phipps, 2021a). From the razing of Greenwood, Tulsa in 1921 to the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, and the case of Amy Cooper (a white woman) calling the police on Christian Cooper (a Black man, of no relation to her) for the crime of birdwatching and requesting that she place her dog on its leash, white women's false allegations and our white tears have been dangerous and often fatal (Phipps, 2021a and 2021b).

These weaponised white tears are equally effective against Black women. The masculinisation of Black women is significant, because it perpetuates a stereotype of Black women as strong – physically, mentally, and emotionally. Contrasted with white women, and our delicacy, it has been used by white women to silence Black women, to centre themselves and their hurt when

2 Lack of capitalisation is deliberate and in keeping with how the author chooses to spell her name

accused of racism resulting in the potential for Black women to be seen as the aggressor.

And it has impeded the feminist movement. Whilst there were some tentative collaborations between white and Black women during second-wave feminism, Black women were advised to keep race out of the agenda and accused of being divisive when they reflected their racial and gendered oppression. Kendall (2020) argues that underpinning this is the belief that white women's need for equality is stronger than Black women's, who can withstand the oppression they face due to their strength. This socialisation of Black women is embedded in hegemony such that we become desensitised to their wants and needs. This is further evident in the phenomenon of 'missing white women syndrome' (Conlin and David, 2015, pp. 37) 'whereby news outlets report more extensively on missing persons' cases that involve young, conventionally attractive, middle- to upper-class white women.' Contrast for example the news coverage of Sarah Everard's murder earlier this year (a white woman, whose name I don't need to Google) versus the murders of Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry in 2020 (two Black women, whose names I did have to Google), who were later dehumanised when serving police officers took photos of their dead bodies.

And whilst emotional outbursts from women of any race are viewed less favourably than those of their male counterparts, with one framed as hysterical and another impassioned, Black women carry the extra burden of the 'angry Black female' trope.

All this builds to paint a picture that is more nuanced than the author had initially contended. In this inquiry I may find that I am oppressed due to my gender, and I might equally be the oppressor due to my gender and my race. This is confronting for me. I entered this research motivated to find my voice to speak up and out on the subject of racism. And now I need to consider how I might be at risk of perpetuating it myself. My voice, which I had considered might be silenced due to my gender, carried a weight I hadn't appreciated due to my race. If it wasn't already, the significance and highly personal nature of this inquiry was starting

to weigh heavily. As Accapadi (2007, p. 208) notes: 'White women can also be so invested in our oppression as women that we resist addressing our privilege as white.' This quote acted as a cautionary note for me as I entered this inquiry, I recognised I had already fallen into this trap in conceiving the research and I would need to be alive to this as the inquiry progressed.

Action - What we did

Why Action Research?

Action Research (AR) encompasses a broad range of approaches to undertaking research, with some common characteristics and principles that give a shared sense of DNA, and hence is described in the literature as a family of disciplines (Bradbury, 2015). It has a dual aim to know more about the subject being studied (an inquiry aim) and to create meaningful change (an action aim) (Coleman, 2017). The dual aims of AR were complementary to the intent of this inquiry. The author selected to undertake a Cooperative Inquiry (CI) approach.

Cooperative Inquiry has two foundational principles that guide participation. The first has an epistemological basis and holds that to generate meaningful knowledge about the inquiry question one must personally be inside the experience. The second is political in nature, asserting that participation is voluntary, guided by members' personal interest and that power is shared (Kasl and Yorks, 2010). This frames participants as co-inquirers who have shared responsibility for framing the inquiry question, determining how the inquiry process will work, sense-making their shared experiences and agreeing if and how findings are shared beyond the group (Bray et al., 2000).

Finally, this quote from Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 9) really gets to the heart of why CI felt appropriate to this inquiry:

> This political form of participation affirms peoples' right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them. It asserts the importance of liberating the muted voices of those held

> down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism, and homophobia.

This liberationist foundation is key to the motivation for this research – it was this author's hope that through this research myself and my co-inquirers would become empowered and emboldened to show up as anti-racist in practical ways that create meaningful shifts in our organisations and for the lived experience of people of colour.

Establishing co-inquirers

The inquiry group for this research was established in two ways. Firstly, the author outlined the intent of this research to a colleague in the system and asked for recommendations on who to approach. Secondly, the author put a tweet out on Twitter, which stated:

> I am looking for white women, who are senior in their organisations, to participate in a collaborative inquiry into the conditions that enable us to show up as anti-racist in our organisations. If you're interested, DM me and we can arrange a chat.

In total, 18 women expressed an interest via these two routes and were sent an email outlining how the research would be conducted, both methodology and time commitments. This resulted in 11 women opting out of the research at this stage. Of the seven remaining women, all were invited to a conversation with the author. Ahead of these conversations, the author shared suggested pre-reading regarding different levels of racism, antiracism, white privilege, and white fragility. The intention was to ensure that potential co-inquirers had a basis of shared language. During the conversations, as part of the ethical considerations for this research, the author discussed the risks associated with this research and invited a discussion on how these could be mitigated. All seven women confirmed their commitment to participate in the research. However, once inquiry sessions were diarised, two women withdrew based on availability. The core inquiry group became six women, the author and five other co-

inquirers, each working in a different organisation across the public sector.

Cycles of inquiry and research analysis

The inquiry group met four times, over a period of eight weeks, for two hours at a time. All inquiry sessions took place via MS Teams, and sessions were recorded and transcribed using MS Teams functionality, and with express permission from co-inquirers.

The first inquiry session focussed on creating a communicative space (Habermas, 1987), which meant building trust, getting to know one another better and contracting for the work as a group. This included explicit expression of the voluntary nature of the research and the fact that co-inquirers could opt out at any time. The inquiry group also established a Google document to capture reflections between inquiry cycles. The second, third and fourth inquiry sessions followed a broad pattern of check-in, reflections since we had last met, exploration of actions which we had or hadn't taken in our pursuit to show up as antiracist and discussions about why that might be.

In our final session together, we did some shared sense-making of the conditions that had emerged as important, having undertaken free-writing prior to that session with the prompt: 'So far, the conditions emerging as important to me are….' This helped us to collaboratively identify the conditions that had emerged as important to us in the inquiry. The recordings and transcripts of each session were then analysed, by the author, to identify how those conditions had been expressed during the inquiry sessions using direct, non-attributable quotes to bring these to life.

Findings

As an inquiry group, we identified five conditions that we felt were important in enabling each of us to show up as antiracist in our organisations. They were:

- Knowledge and confidence
- Having a platform

- Organisational context
- Living with discomfort and our personal risk appetites
- A reflective space and support.

Taking each in turn, this paper will expand on what was meant by the condition and share quotes that offer an insight into how this showed up in the inquiry. To protect the anonymity of my co-inquirers, their quotes are denoted by the first letter of their first name.

Knowledge and confidence

This inquiry question was shaped in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in 2020 and something that the author noticed was showing up for herself and others that she spoke to in her organisation at the time was a sense of not knowing what to do and what to say and feeling ill-equipped for conversations about race for fear of 'getting it wrong'. This is not surprising, since the subject of race, racism and antiracism together with the implications for white people and white women in this inquiry, is nuanced and complex. A well-intended individual can perpetuate racist behaviours and actions, simply due to a lack of knowledge. It was therefore anticipated that knowledge and confidence would emerge as a condition, and indeed it was mentioned first in many of the free-writing excerpts.

A acknowledged the need for

> "Understanding and thoughtfulness on the topic of institutional and structural racism - the need to reflect, to amend, to revise, to try to be true to my values." And P reflected that "I had to do quite a lot of learning around what anti-racist really meant."

However, having knowledge is only part of this enabling condition. The ability to feel confident in that knowledge and the language we use, and to build confidence around the subject of race and racism emerged as important. P articulated this as a need for

> "Confidence - in my knowledge and understanding of both racism and anti-racism, and also confidence in the words that I say... Probably also a way to build confidence, such as this research."

It was also about having the confidence to risk getting it wrong, which L expressed as:

> "I think that for me, the conditions include giving myself and others permission to talk about race - tentative uncomfortable conversations are better than no conversation at all, and I think that if I apply 'making every contact count' I will come to be recognised and trusted as authentic."

Having a platform

The notion of having a platform was expressed in two ways during the inquiry. The first related to seniority, and the power and influence we hold as senior people in our organisations. Predominantly, this was because it gave us access to meetings, to people, and organisational policies and processes. It offered us a level of influence that is not afforded to everyone.

A expressed it as: "But it is right that when I'm in a privileged position as a senior woman with a level of freedom that my seniority gives me that I can stamp my feet and I do so." Similarly for P it showed up as: "Seniority - maybe the wrong word - but something about having a platform and some kind of requirement for colleagues to give me some space to speak or do, outside of the organisational norm."

However, having a platform also came through as having organisational credibility or a trusted relationship that enabled you to say and do things that you otherwise might not do.

For example, K realised that her long service and good standing in her organisation presented her with an opportunity:

> "I'm really well thought of in the organization I work in and therefore my ability to make change is way more than I realise. And so I'm just feeling quite empowered after this conversation."

Meanwhile, A was able to leverage the trusted relationship she had with a member of her team to hold a challenging conversation and provide space for reflection:

> "I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had my relationship and my personal rapport with him to rely upon. I know he thinks I'm a good thing. Yeah, that was what mitigated the risk……So I was glad that that for me was one of the enabling facts. We knew one another well enough, and in our team, we call them brave conversations, we try to have brave conversations with each other and normally they're about work and this one was about work. But it was also very personal, and we still managed to do it and he and I are, we are in a good place."

Having a platform was therefore a combination of both the privilege seniority affords you in your organisation, together with building the trusted relationships required to hold challenging conversations.

Organisational context

For two of the group, their organisations had made explicit statements about becoming antiracist organisations. And this proved to be an important condition for those women. A described it as

> "Grounding the work that we're doing to lead anti-racism in our organisations in the stated aims, intentions, processes, procedures of our organization where they're on our side, even if they're not always implemented, gives us lots of safe ground to speak from."

It was the basis from which L was able to challenge her Line Manager:

> "So I said I'm just not comfortable. But this is where I wasn't as brave as you A. So what I said was, having been on my anti-racism training, I think it's really important that we live those values through everything we do. I will know that we haven't done this properly and other people will know that too and we may not get the outcomes that we desire as an organization."

Having this 'safe ground to speak from' minimised the perception of risk, both personal and professional and gave the two women who had it, express permission to challenge the status quo. However, it created a different concern, which was that there was a gap between organisational aspiration and reality. And both A and L expressed concerns around this, and the potential consequences for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues in particular who were being recruited as part of diversifying the talent pipeline in their organisations. This is exemplified in L's story here, where she is talking about being approached by a newly recruited Black woman in the team who was

> "Really tearful sobbing and she just said, you know you tell me and the organisation tells me that you're anti-racist but I don't know if you are now. She said, like I think you are as an individual, but I don't know if this organisation is, because I don't understand why this is happening to me."

For those of us whose organisations had not made explicit statements about being anti-racist, it could be more difficult to find our 'hook' for this work as P describes: "And I'm not really seeing anything happening and I don't, I'm sort of just looking for a hook. I'm looking for a way to be able to do something, and I haven't found one yet."

And some of us find that 'hook' where we can, albeit it can feel manipulative as I describe here:

> "It feels Machiavellian almost to say it, but then my mind goes well that's an opportunity, isn't it? Because here's some really damning evidence of the need for us to do some of the work that I would like us to be doing."

I think that one of the things P and I were grappling with is that our organisations are not committed to being antiracist and are perhaps stuck in the place that being not racist is good enough. And this is where organisational context meets knowledge and confidence as enabling conditions. If the organisation does not understand or seek to understand race, racism and antiracism in the way that has been set out here, then that impacts on the 'permission' you have to do good work in this space and on the

time that it will take to do it, since building awareness and understanding takes time.

The significance then of organisational context, within this inquiry, was the extent to which race, racism and anti-racism were understood and explicitly identified as areas for focus.

Living with discomfort and our personal risk appetites

This condition had multiple elements to it. The idea of discomfort was both one of feeling uncomfortable and doing the work anyway, which K expressed as "being ok with being uncomfortable." However, it also spoke to a fear we had about whether what we were doing was enough and generating sustainable change quickly enough. N articulated this as

> "The fear is that we need to go a lot faster than we already are, but change takes time to work its way through….need for speed is in tension with the necessity to greet people where they are on their journey, as they are, wherever they are on that journey. And those two things don't sit comfortably."

In both there was a sense of the need to persevere and have resilience since the work was not always linear and any shifts were not immediately apparent. I acknowledged this in an inquiry session when I said

> "That's a question I'm holding all the time, is what I'm doing enough? Is it good enough? Is it fast enough? Is it impactful enough? I don't know, but that's probably what stopped me doing this work before because it's all too challenging to my fragile ego, because I'm not as good as I want to be, or I'm not as brave as I want to be, or there's times when I don't show up in the way they want me to."

My reference to my fragile ego evokes DiAngelo's (2019) notion of white fragility. And also highlights the discomfort of not feeling 'good enough' if we don't consistently show up in the way that we say we want to. And that generates an ongoing choice for white women – discomfort due to a gap between what you say and what

you do, or discomfort because you do what you say, and that challenges the status quo?

The statement above acknowledges that there is discomfort in both choices. However, what came through for us in our inquiry was that it went beyond discomfort – there is an element of risk, real or perceived, in showing up as antiracist or trying to do so. That risk can be to one's own sense of self, as L acknowledged when she described feeling "Slightly nervous about learning about myself and doing that publicly." Or it can be related to getting things wrong and harming others in the process, as P described: "But there's a fine line. There's a risk you could get it wrong you. There's, I think there's a risk that by showing up it could make things worse." And it can be professionally risky too, if you are deemed to challenge the status quo too hard or in ways that those who seek to uphold the status quo don't like. N referenced this, albeit not directly in relation to antiracism, when she shared that "In the senior [leadership][3] they called me trouble. I was totally trouble, but also like that's very difficult to be labelled as trouble. You don't really go anywhere after that." And that left us, as a group, with a sense that we need to be clear on what we were prepared to risk in pursuit of this work as N described:

> "This was something, you know, you constantly ask yourself - what am I prepared to suffer through and what am I prepared to lose? And when, when you can get to some level of comfortability in the response then quite freeing in what you go out and do as a result."

At the same time, recognising that the answer would be different for each of us, as would our perceptions of risk as I articulated:

> "That risk will be different for each of us and it will be perceived differently by each of us as well. So even if all things were equal, which they won't be, and we all had the same risk level in how showing up would affect each of us, we will have a different appetite for or perception of that risk."

3 Language has been changed to prevent N or her organisation being identifiable

A reflective space and support

One of the things that drew people into this research was the opportunity to work in collaboration with others. K described in our first inquiry session the "hope to be challenged, at the moment I'm the one in my organisation doing the challenging." Similarly, L expressed: "Hope for myself - opportunity to learn together, stretch my thinking, to challenge my thinking."

And it acted as an important space for sense making, as expressed by K: "It's become very quickly [a] really important structure for me for helping me make sense of things that are going on."

And more than this, gave us impetus to act. As K reflected: "I'm sitting here thinking to myself, I need to do, just this reflective conversation is making me feel I'm not doing enough or I am allowing other stuff to get in the way." As we inspired each other with the stories we shared and the courage we demonstrated.

Importantly, having experienced the power of the reflective space, it encouraged people to open these up for others. Whether this was hosting Let's Talk About Race sessions as I did, emailing colleagues to share our participation as K did, or sharing learning with the team as L plans to do. In each of those moves we were able to extend our research beyond ourselves and move from first- and second-person inquiry, into third-person. And whilst not every move we made was deemed successful, as K recounts:

> "Our first session really left an imprint on me….I wrote a note to my peers….sharing this because it is really important to me, if you're curious, if you're interested, get in touch. And I've just had resounding silence….So at the moment, I feel genuinely angry."

Being able to share the ups and downs with a group of like-minded women helped us not to become despondent and to remain focussed on what we were trying to do rather than getting lost in our thoughts, as I expressed:

> "For me at least, the joy of this group is this place to go 'Oh, I did this and I'm really pleased with how it went. Or I did this and I'm really not sure if it went as well as I would have

> liked.' And you know how do I make sense of that, with other people who grapple with this stuff because otherwise the thing I find is I'm just in my own head."

Getting support wasn't constrained to the co-inquiry group either. A was able to discuss something she was facing with a trusted colleague and take the time to reflect on what she wanted to say, to ensure it went as positively as she could plan for.

> "I spoke to a senior colleague who basically is like a coach to me….and I literally wrote out what I wanted to say, and that's not like me at all. I busk everything. Right, but I literally wrote out what I wanted to say in order that I used the words that I wanted to use."

Conclusion

The author advocates that white women who wish to show up as antiracist take the time to ensure they fully understand what they are entering in to, and to have an awareness of how this might affect them and the strategies they can deploy so as not to be derailed. Further, that they commit fully to developing their own understanding of race and racism, together with a critical examination of what it means to be white in their particular context. Where possible, white women need to recognise the platform(s) that they have, whiteness being one of them, the nature of their relationships and personal and professional credibility being another, and seniority if it is applicable. Having recognised their platforms, they must leverage them to the best of their ability and not become too disheartened when this doesn't always play out in the ways that they might hope. If an anti-racist stance is proclaimed in their organisation, then white women can seek to leverage this as a useful way of aligning their personal actions with the stated aims of the organisation and using this to challenge discrepancies. Finally, white women must acknowledge there is a potential cost (as well as huge benefits) to doing this work and be clear on what they are prepared to give up in order to achieve racial equality. And crucially, you must have a support network. That doesn't need to be in the form of an inquiry group per se,

however having people who share your commitments and who can act as a role model and mentor are key to sustaining effort in this work and keeping yourself honest about your impact.

Limitations of the research

The first limitation of this research relates to the partial nature of this account – both due to the write up being the work of one member of the inquiry group, rather than a collaborative effort with the inquiry group, and the limitations of capturing within a defined word count the richness of our conversations.

The second limitation relates to a fear that I expressed in our first inquiry session, which was

> "My slight fear is if we are not careful we create an echo chamber of white women in organisations talking to one another, and this is my, you know this is linked to my previous experience congratulating myself for having done something, rather than thinking about whether that's enough, or whether it's really had an impact."

The limitation being that as white women we were talking about racism, which we have not been victims of. And we will have therefore missed opportunities to intervene or to be critically reflective about our actions, because we have not had a person of colour in the room to help us see our blind spots and/or challenge us to notice the ways in which our own actions were upholding the very systems and structures we are seeking to challenge and dismantle. Further, collectively we may have colluded to believe in our 'white exceptionalism', congratulating each other for what we did do, rather than challenging each other to do as much as we can do.

A final limitation was the limited duration of our inquiry. In total we spent 8 hours together across an eight-week period. As six women who had never worked together, let alone on something so nuanced and complex, we rightly spent the majority of our first inquiry session getting to know one another and building trust with the aim of 'starting well'. This proved to be important, and I

think was a key factor in ensuring that we achieved a level of depth in our discussions and thinking, despite the time limits. That said, I can't help but wonder where our conversations might have taken us if we had been able to complete further cycles of inquiry.

The limited time means that the conditions we have identified are based on our initial reflections and observations. Further cycles of inquiry would have enabled us to reflect on whether particular conditions were more or less important, and whether one acted as a precursor to others.

A limitation often associated with AR and Qualitative Research more broadly is the fact that the findings are less generalisable than those generated by Quantitative Research. Whilst I recognise that this is often the case, I do hope that the nature of our inquiry group, six women drawn from six distinct organisations, and the nature of our findings, five broad conditions, means that these themes will have some resonance for organisations and white women beyond those represented in this inquiry.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank her co-inquirers for saying yes, and for sharing their wisdom and vulnerability in our inquiry sessions. The author would also like to acknowledge her MSc27 learning set and set advisor for their support and challenge during the process of undertaking this research for a dissertation in part-fulfilment of a Master of Science in People and Organisational Development at Roffey Park Institute. Finally, thanks to all who choose love over hate, justice over injustice and action over apathy – together we can make this world a better place.

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Biography

Carolyn Parker is a HR and OD professional, with over 15 years' experience across private and public sector. Her passion is creating inclusive workplace cultures where people can thrive and realise their full potential.

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ALARj 29 (1) (2023) 55-82

Participatory Action Learning and Action Research for inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education

Ashnie Mahadew

Abstract

In South Africa, despite the abolishment of apartheid and a democratic dispensation, exclusion and incidences of discrimination based on numerous marginalised identity markers are widely reported at schools. This article is a segment of a study on a group of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) stakeholders comprising of a university ECCE researcher, six ECCE teachers and two ECCE teacher trainers who explored inclusion using a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) design. The group formed an Action Learning set and engaged in mutual and collaborative learning to transform their learning environments to become more inclusive. Data were generated using narratives from reflective journals and purposeful conversations. Framed by the head, heart and hands model (Siphos, Battisti & Grimm, 2008; Singleton, 2015), the PALAR design necessitates praxis, an iterative process of collaborative reflection and action, where theoretical knowledge is translated into practice. Participants demonstrated this praxis by firstly reflecting on their thoughts and emotions in the first two themes. They then proceeded to institute change in their classrooms which provided a catalyst for deeper transformation of their personal selves. The study contributes both theoretically and methodologically as a PALAR design is utilised to create a more democratic and socially just research and learning platform, resulting in increasing teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical application of inclusion. This study has the potential to contribute to an inclusive ECCE learning space with a positive

impact on the lives of children, especially those from marginalised groups.

Key words: Early Childhood Care and Education, Participatory Action Learning and Action Research, inclusion

What is known about the topic?

Participatory action learning and action research encourages participants to become critically reflective practitioners through a process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Participants document their experiences and critically reflect in an attempt to improve professional practice.

What does this paper add?

The paper adds to the knowledge base on PALAR as an inclusive research design. It is through reflection in the PALAR process that research participants achieve a deep level of inclusion, which transcends the superficial implementation of policies or adjustment of pedagogical practice. The paper emphasizes that inclusion is an inner journey where teachers are conscientised and reflect on their past to transform their current thinking. Only with critical reflection and a change in thinking can inclusion be practiced authentically.

Who will benefit from its content?

The paper may guide ECCE teachers to create learning environments which are authentically inclusive.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

The paper is relevant in the field of ALAR as it emphasizes that for learning and research to be impactful and transformative, all aspects of being human need to be activated. Using the head, heart and hands model (cognitive, affection and psychomotor), this paper categorises the research learnings in a more holistic manner.

Received March 2022 Reviewed September 2022 Published October 2023

Introduction

This study seeks to explore inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) using a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) design. ECCE refers specifically to the care and education of children from birth to four before formal schooling (Harrison, 2020). Various global studies (Aubert et al., 2017; Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016; Underwood, Valeo, & Wood, 2012) have highlighted inclusion as an essential component in the delivery of a quality ECCE

programme. Hence, an inclusive ECCE learning programme embraces a diversity of learners, including diversities of gender, race, ability, socio- economic background, special educational needs or language. In this study, a PALAR design (Wood, 2020; Setlhare-Kajee, 2018) attempts to mobilise an ECCE community to co-create knowledge for mutual learning and capacity building. The following three sections outline the concepts of early childhood care and education, inclusion and PALAR to provide a brief background for the article.

Early Childhood Care and Education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) targets the foundational stage of education and development of young children ranging from birth to age four before the reception year (Ebrahim, Okwany & Barry, 2019). Seeing that 'teaching is one of the foremost of personal relations' (Macmurray, 1964, p. 17) *care* in education is especially emphasized in the early years. Teachers in the early years are especially interested in developing the whole child in all domains including cognitive, social and psychomotor domains (Singleton, 2015). It is important to note that this age group has been recognised as the most important phase of the human lifespan as it lays the groundwork for future learning and development (UNESCO, 2019). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number four highlights that children need to have access to quality ECCE facilities regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, language, or remoteness (United Nations, 2015). In South Africa, the National Development Plan 2030 also identifies quality ECCE as a means to reduce inequality and break the poverty cycle (South African National Planning Commission, 2012). Despite this, the sector is plagued by 'wicked problems' which include poor salaries, low job stability, underqualified teachers and gaps in the quality of provision between well-resourced and under-resourced centres (Khumalo, 2022). There are many factors which contribute to quality in ECCE, however, in this article, I focus on inclusion as an important determinant of quality in ECCE. The study seeks to explore my experiences with eight

other ECCE stakeholders who sought to create an inclusive ECCE programme using a PALAR design.

Inclusion in ECCE

Inclusion calls for equal opportunities, access, participation and achievement for all children in ECCE, irrespective of diverse identities. These identities include differences in race, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, trauma, learning styles, and disability (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). It, therefore, follows that all members in early education and care centres need to be valued while they play and learn in collaboration with others. In fact, inclusive ECCE expects diversity and welcomes difference as a rich resource rather than as a problem (Borgonovi, 2019). To provide a quality ECCE programme that benefits all children, teachers need to work in creative ways to engage with the diverse challenges encountered by young children and their families (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017). It is essential to also bear in mind that authentic inclusion goes deeper than the implementation of policies or adjustment of the physical learning space or pedagogical practice (Corbett & Slee , 2000; Petriwskyj, 2010), but requires teachers to first examine their thinking and attitudes towards diverse groups of people in a critical manner. This deep level of inclusion is consistent with Freire's (1974) concept of conscientisation. In this article, conscientisation refers to becoming aware of or developing a critical consciousness to contest existing ways of thinking (Villanueva & O' Sullivan, 2019). As a result, teachers would become more aware of their own unconscious bias or stereotyped attitudes towards groups of people regarded as 'other'. This can be achieved by looking closely at the power issues that operate due to diversity and the privilege of certain groups. Thus, to become inclusive reflection will result in praxis – a change facilitated through inner reflection and action (Villanueva & O' Sullivan, 2019). Hence in this study, an authentic, inclusive learning environment within the ECCE context is created as a product of this deep level of conscientisation that results in a more socially just and democratic ECCE programme. Aligned with these

principles of authentic inclusion I selected a PALAR design which embraced deep reflection and action based on the multiple perspectives of my research group and enabled the voices of a diverse group of people.

Participatory Action Research and Action Learning design

A PALAR design integrates both Participatory Action Research (PAR) and lifelong Action Learning resulting in enhanced knowledge and skills of a diverse group of stakeholders (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). PALAR occurs in iterative cycles comprising of sustained learning, responding to changing contexts and relationship-building (Luthuli & Wood, 2019). Action Research (AR) was initially conceptualised by Kurt Lewin as a process of combining experimental approaches for research, with social programmes intending to advance theory and action for social advocacy and transformation (Putman & Rock, 2018). This circular process enables a collaborative meaning-making and a deeper understanding of complex issues related to inclusion and diversity. Through this process of reflection and action, PALAR design serves as *praxis* or a bridge between theory and practice (Freire, 2000). The purpose of reflection is not just to gain a deeper understanding of an issue, but to transform practice and ultimately make a difference in the world. Hence, praxis may result in changes in classroom practice but may also transcend the classroom to benefit society. Belonging to the AR group of research design, PALAR adopts the plan, act, observe and reflect steps which inform iterative cycles of learning and research (Zuber Skerritt, 2001). Relationship building is an important element of PALAR as knowledge is constructed collaboratively in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. The reflection that occurs throughout the PALAR process, is important for the sustainability of the project, but also enabled me as the facilitator to gain a deeper understanding of my own rationale for the project.

Why inclusion, ECCE and PALAR for me?

Three factors prompted my interest in the three concepts mentioned above, namely inclusion, ECCE and PALAR design. Firstly, in my previous twenty-year career, which entailed teaching young children, I was often challenged by the diverse needs of the learners in my classroom. I had to think creatively to differentiate my lessons to meet the needs of children who were developing typically and those who were behind or ahead. I found that with an overload of administrative duties, large classroom sizes, and a growing diversity of children, the practice of inclusion was challenging to achieve. However, it was a practice that required urgent attention, as I could see the benefits of inclusion in the young lives that I was entrusted with. It was apparent to me that all children displayed their strengths and weaknesses in different areas, and none could be standardised to 'fit into a box'. I became aware that to practice inclusion, there needed to be congruency with my belief system and my words and actions. Hence for me, teaching and learning involved more than just following the curriculum, it was about building relationships and showing care to the young lives I was fortunate enough to shape. So, to me, inclusion is not something to be adopted just for a particular situation as a teacher in a classroom, it had to be my way of being in my daily life.

Secondly, in my present career as an initial teacher educator and an ECCE module developer at a university, I found an interest in designing a module for inclusion in ECCE. One of the challenges faced by teacher educators is to train teachers to teach a diverse group of children successfully (Florian & Camedda, 2020). This especially holds true in South Africa, where due to the legacy of apartheid and colonisation, discrepancies in education quality for marginalised groups persist (Nakidien, Singh & Sayed, 2021). Hence as part of a team tasked to develop an undergraduate degree programme for the birth to four ECCE sector teachers, I considered it vital to look at the need for inclusive education within this context. Consequently, I was cautioned by my reading of an earlier study by Killoran, Tymon and Frempong (2007), who maintain that putting inclusion into practice is a complex process

rife with obstacles and challenges, primarily due to a lack of training or inconsistencies in the initial teacher education programme. Studies by Walton and Osman (2018) emphasise the importance of a theoretical background of inclusive education in initial teacher education programmes, whereas Mudzingwa (2019) on the other hand found that initial teacher education programmes prepared teachers theoretically but lacked practical application of inclusive education in their classrooms. Mudzingwa also warns in his writings that university preservice modules provide an introduction to inclusion; however, they fail to provide sufficient pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach in a diverse classroom. With limited studies in this sector, I needed to ascertain the current situation regarding inclusion in a South African ECCE centre. This knowledge should contribute to the content for a future module on inclusion in ECCE to be offered as part of a new degree programme for ECCE teachers. Despite the growing evidence that pre-service training programmes have the potential to advance inclusive practices in education, not much research explains how to achieve this end in the ECCE context. This creates a practical knowledge gap in the ECCE sector.

Thirdly, research should not just be about university researchers gathering data from their ivory towers. University researchers have a responsibility to engage with people in communities and channel their talents to solve problems and learn about things that matter to them. PALAR research is therefore not about performing research *on* passive communities but rather an active process of enabling the voices and choices of the research participants (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013). Seeing that ECCE is the most marginalised sector of education in South Africa, I chose a PALAR design to enable their voices in collaborative meaning-making. The ultimate aim of the engagement was to develop a handbook on inclusion comprising of participant learnings in the form of photographs and captions. In this way knowledge created by the research group would be cascaded to other interested role-players in ECCE. Without a doubt this research design would facilitate praxis – a product of iterative and collaborative reflection and action within the ALS in an attempt to effect positive change.

The people who came together

Due to my ongoing relationship and engagement with *New Horizons*[1], a non-profit ECCE training centre, I invited students and trainers at the centre to participate in the project. This study included six ECCE teachers who worked at different ECCE centres teaching children aged from birth to four, who were students or prospective students at New Horizons. The research group also included two teacher trainers working at New Horizons and myself, a university researcher in ECCE, who came to be known as an Action Learning Set (ALS). This ALS formed a collaborative group that used our individual knowledge and skills to collaborate and achieve deeper learning to address challenges in our unique contexts (Morrison, 2017). Much of the success of a PALAR design is dependent on the creation of an ALS who serve as core participants and drivers of the project. Wood (2020) states that the ALS should not be too large and should remain consistent throughout the project. Table one outlines the biographical details of the research participants.

Biographical details of research participants

Research Participant	Age	Gender	Work Experience	Occupation	Qualification
Annerly	22	Female	Teacher, 2 years	ECCE teacher	NQF LEVEL 4 ECD certificate
Amina	28	Female	Centre owner and teacher, 7 years	ECCE teacher	Bachelor of Education student NQF LEVEL 5 ECD certificate

1 Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the children and participants.

Research Participant	Age	Gender	Work Experience	Occupation	Qualification
Bahle	27	Female	Teacher, 4 years and trainer, 2 years	ECCE teacher & trainer	NQF LEVEL 5 ECD certificate
Jessica	34	Female	Teacher, 12 years and trainer and assessor, 4 years	ECCE teacher, trainer and assessor	NQF LEVEL 6 ECD certificate
Kaveri	59	Female	Teacher, 20 years	ECCE teacher	Matric Prospective student
Lihle	26	Female	Teacher, 5 years	ECCE teacher	NQF LEVEL 4 ECD certificate
Raadia	28	Female	Teacher, 7 years	ECCE teacher	Matric Prospective student
Ranjeni	42	Female	Teacher, 14 years	ECCE teacher	NQF LEVEL 6 ECD certificate
Ashnie	46	Female	University Researcher 3 years	University Researcher	Master of Education

Table 1: Biographical details of the research participants
Adapted from Mahadew (2021)

Members of the ALS were new to research therefore my first priority was to level the power relationships between the participants and myself as the researcher. As a PALAR facilitator, I was firstly forced to re-examine my position as the sole creator of knowledge in the ALS. In the initial stages of the project, having a teaching background in early childhood education, it was difficult to relinquish my position as a teacher and wear the cap of guide and facilitator instead. My adjusted role as the guide and facilitator was to create a climate of mutual learning where every member was encouraged to participate freely and equally. I emphasized that the purpose of the project was to learn from the participants and their experiences. Respecting their prior learning was thus integral to the success of the research.

Furthermore, the explanation of the principles of PALAR were outlined at the beginning, as it was something new to the members of the ALS. This unique form of research emphasised not just research but sustainable learning and leadership for all the participants. The commitment, compromise and communication required from members were much greater than regular university research, but so were the vast benefits to community and society. The challenge for me was for members of the ALS to buy-in and own the project. The acquisition of knowledge would liberate them to become action leaders who could be instrumental in emancipating children, other members in their centres and communities. As we delved deeper into the PALAR design participants grew in confidence. The members of the ALS selected various roles that required facilitation and leadership during the research cycles. Hence my position as leader of the project was relinquished in gradual stages.

For each cycle, I was guided by the plan, act, observe, and reflect steps commonly utilised in the AR genre (Wood, 2020; Zuber-Skerritt, 2001). In the planning step, I coached my research group to plan a baseline questionnaire that served as an assessment of the current situation at their various centres (Ojageer, 2019). Stemming from the analysis of the baseline questionnaire, we identified challenges experienced and areas of learning. Following this,

during the acting step, we identified areas of need in the group. The acting step also included learning activities where participants selected topics from the areas of need and prepared slides, videos, and simple readings. This was followed by the observing step consisting of collaborative discussions within the group and further learning. In step four, the reflecting step, participants recorded their reflections in their journals which shaped future cycles of learning and research. As the cycles of enquiry progressed, I learned to step back and enable greater agency to the other group members which resulted in greater epistemic justice (McAteer & Wood, 2018). It is also important to note that not all members were keen to be active participants who were prepared to prepare presentations for the other members. This was accepted and each participant felt comfortable and safe in the project. Having said this, in further cycles of learning and research, most of the group developed greater confidence in their skills through the iterative cycles.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance protects research participants from potential harm (Resnik. 2011). Ethical approval was received by the University before the research phase began. Due to the participatory nature of PALAR, and the prolonged interaction between people, the ethical considerations needed to be negotiated and accepted by all members of the ALS (Wood, 2022). The research also needed to be relevant and beneficial to the research group.

The Head, Heart and Hands Model for engaged learning and research

For learning and research to be impactful and transformative, all aspects of being human need to be activated. The head, heart and hands (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) model may be used as a framework to summarise the competencies that result from engaging in PALAR design (Wood, 2020). This model was first outlined by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss pedagogue who

stated that learning should be a unity of the head, heart and hands or a combination of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning (Gazibara, 2013). Learning becomes more meaningful by engaging different aspects of a person's being – cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains (Siphos, Battisti & Grimm, 2008; Singleton, 2015). For example, the head aspect of the model highlights critical thinking, problem solving and reflection whereas the heart aspect emphasizes the building of relationships, embracing diverse viewpoints and an understanding of complex societal problems. The hands aspect of the model puts learning into action by engaging in activities which bridge the gap between theory and practice leading to more relevant learning.

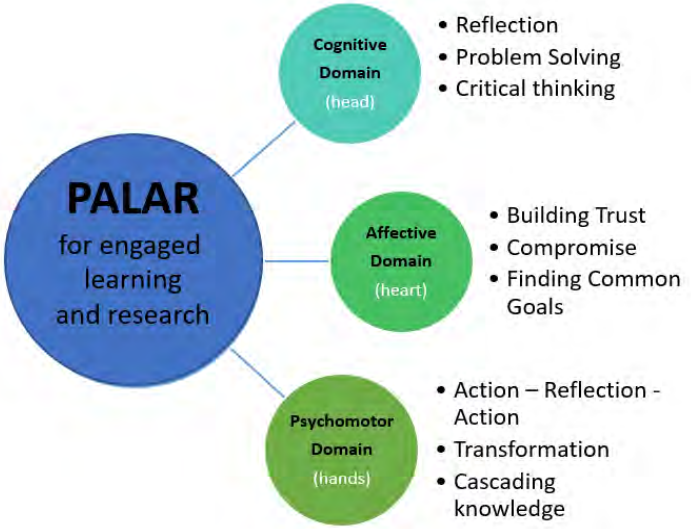

Figure 1: PALAR for engaged Learning and Research
Source: Author

The research aspect of PALAR also does not just focus on the acquisition of knowledge by university researchers but rather involves a more holistic approach. The head, heart and hands model can also form a useful framework to guide the research process. The head aspect will involve critical thinking, problem-solving and reflection among the ALS, while the heart aspect of the model will emphasize the building of trust, compromise and communication among the stakeholders. The hands aspect of the model in research, emphasizes the deliberate action and engagement in PALAR, where participants are able to apply their knowledge to real-life situations. Wood (2020) suggests that this model may be used as a guide for all members of the ALS not just the principal researcher as it promotes deeper learning by integrating intellectual, emotional, and practical dimensions of education, enabling well-rounded individuals capable of addressing complex challenges in the world. Further, the use of this model (figure 1) resonated with my background as an early-years teacher seeking a more holistic representation of learning and research.

Voices of the Action Learning set

The section below presents the voices of the ALS in the form of selected written narratives from participants' journal reflections. Also included are some of the excerpts from purposeful conversations where participants built on each other's accounts, evidencing a collaborative meaning-making. The section uses the head, heart and hands model to group the findings into what the participants were thinking about (head), our relationships and what we were feeling (heart) and what we were doing (hands) during the cycles of inquiry.

What we were thinking

As mentioned previously, to achieve authentic inclusion people need to first examine their thinking and attitudes towards diverse groups of people in a critical manner. The ALS engaged in activities to begin a process of conscientisation, to become critically aware of their own thinking, especially regarding issues of power,

privilege and diversity. The group engaged in a privilege game which was planned to raise awareness of various forms of privilege and a deeper understanding of how the intersectionality of race, socio-economic class, gender and other identity markers may shape our positions and the positions of the children in our care. Based on the Privilege Walk (see https://blog.shrm.org/blog/my-experience-with-the-privilege-walk), this game generally can be arranged in an open space with participants lined up in a horizontal line. Participants step forward or back as the facilitator reads a statement or question based on the privilege experienced in their lives. Due to Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing, I redesigned the Privilege Walk as an online board game played asynchronously by the participants. The ALS members moved forward or backwards on the board game according to the statements that they read.

Amina, an ECCE teacher, reflected on how the activity took her back to her past and where she was reminded of the hurdles she experienced as a female with no hope of getting an education because of her gender. The privilege game allowed her to reflect on how far she had come because she had worked hard to get funding to pursue her degree.

> Yeah, talking about these things are not easy. Going back to the past and thinking of how it was before did help to open me up a lot more and realise how much I had overcome. Especially the question about being discouraged from academics or jobs because of my gender. In my family money was not to be wasted on a female's education (Amina).

Engaging in the board game enabled Amina to acknowledge her past struggles which continued to impact her present life (Steyn, 2015). She used the gender discrimination she experienced as a stepping stone to work even harder and strive for a better future. The members of the ALS were inspired by her resilience and inner strength, which enhanced her confidence to face difficulties.

For Lihle, the activity was a reminder that certain conversations and certain discussions were uncomfortable but needed to take place.

> This activity teaches me not to push important discussions about diversity under the carpet. I am privileged and you are not as privileged. This is uncomfortable but important discussions we need to face head on (Lihle).

Lihle recognised the ill-effects of a colour-blind approach which pushes important uncomfortable conversations around diversity, power and privilege under the carpet. Adopting a colour-blind approach (Kemple, Lee & Harris, 2016) appears to be something positive, as in a literal sense, one would not see or be influenced by the colour of a person's skin. However, this approach fails to recognise the historical disadvantages experienced in the past by certain groups of people (Steyn, 2015). The ALS learned that when we fail to acknowledge that some people may require additional support or resources to achieve equal opportunities, inequalities from the past may persist in the present and the future.

Participants were also encouraged to engage in reflective journaling at the end of each cycle. This provided an opportunity for the participants to not just reflect on their learnings about inclusion but also on their own thinking. This meta-reflection or metacognition enabled the ALS to think about one's own reflective processes and cognitive abilities (Du Toit, 2018).

> We reflect so we can do something to make a change. Reflection is important as teachers because it helps us to become better at what we do. We can reflect during our teaching or later during our planning for the next day (Annerly).

In her journal entry, Annerly demonstrates an awareness of the role of reflection during her teaching and during her planning to facilitate change and ultimately improve her pedagogical practice to become more inclusive.

Kaveri also provided opportunities for the children to learn to reflect on their learning.

> At the end of the day get children to reflect on their own day. How was your day? What was good? What was bad? What can we change for tomorrow? It teaches them that they have a say in their own learning. It gives them power and a sense of control in their learning and it builds self-esteem in a child (Kaveri).

This would enable young children to become inclusive by exploring and understanding their emotions and reactions to different situations resulting in emotional intelligence and greater empathy for the people around them. The ALS also learned that when children are encouraged to reflect and act upon their reflections, it increased their agency and ownership of not just their learning, but their actions.

Jessica noted the need for teaching and learning to be reciprocal where the teacher is also open to learn from the children.

> The process of critical reflection allows me to think about how to improve my teaching every day. I can be myself and learn from the children as well. At the end of my lesson or at the end of my day I think about how I could have done things better. How I can improve my teaching for tomorrow. Who are the children who require more support than others? And how I can help them (Jessica).

The ALS learned that inclusion requires teachers to step away from being figures of authority. For there to be authentic inclusion, teaching and learning must be a dialogical process between teachers and learners. This aligns once more with the work of Freire (2000) who disputed traditional models of education, where teachers are seen as authority figures who deposit knowledge into the minds of passive students. This traditional classroom perpetuates oppression and stifles learners from becoming critical emancipated thinkers.

Our relationships and feelings

Our feelings towards the people we establish relationships with, are the essence of both PALAR and inclusive teaching. Positive relationships among people play a significant role in the attitudes,

values and emotions experienced when people collaborate. At the centre of a successful PALAR project is the building of relationships among the ALS and in the absence of democratic and trusting relationships, PALAR cannot truly take place (Wood, 2020). Therefore, in this project as the principal researcher, I made a concerted effort to include activities to encourage the ALS to establish connections with each other. Following an asset mapping exercise, Lihle, a teacher with five years of experience claimed that it was not easy at first to share her strengths and weaknesses with the group. She was however able to take a risk and she later felt a sense of trust when she got to know everyone better.

> I felt a little uncomfortable to talk about my strengths and weaknesses to a group of people that I did not know. But this was one way to start trusting the people in this project so we can all get to know each other better and reach our goals (Lihle).

Jessica, an ECCE assessor, trainer and former teacher, emphasised that as the relationship building activities progressed, a common interest between members of the group centred on improving the lives of children was highlighted.

> We all have come together with one thing in common – our love and passion to work with children. At the heart of this research is love for the children, which helps bring mutual respect, compassion and humanity to work. So, by doing this exercise we all are coming together to share, learn and improve lives (Jessica).

Similarly, Bahle a trainer for ECCE teachers, emphasized her feelings of faith in the research outcomes after the activity because it highlighted common interest among the members of the ALS.

> This relationship building exercise makes me look at our common interest. I believe that if we work together and have faith in what we are doing we will succeed and do great things with this research (Bahle).

Similar to other PALAR research (Damons, 2020; Setlhare-Kajee, 2018) participants also demonstrated mutual purpose which is an essential part of the relationship building in PALAR. Similar to the

purposes of the other participants, Kaveri explained that her life purpose was to shape the values of children in the early years as they were impressionable.

> We teach kids about life and how to treat other people. Kids start with us in ECCE. We have to teach them this first (Kaveri).

Besides reflecting on the relationship building activities in the PALAR project, the participants also reflected on the role of establishing sound relationships as inclusive teachers. Ranjeni explained how spending time getting to know about the child's background will enable teachers to understand the challenges experienced by each child.

> It helps us to do our jobs better. By knowing those around us helps us to understand them better. Building relationships with families helps us to know more about a child and what background they come from. This can assist us in identifying any problems that occur during learning, we would be able to tell if the distracted nature is due to problems at home or a learning difficulty. Our co-workers can also assist us to be better educators. They can share ideas that work in their classrooms as well as what does not work well for them. This will in turn better our teaching methods (Ranjeni).

As part of relationship building Raadia reflected specifically on the need for trust between teachers and children to build inclusive classrooms.

> Children build bonds with adults only after they form trust in them. Being kind towards them helps us to gain trust. This trust will in turn allow the child to be more open and be able to freely communicate with you (Raadia).

Jessica also took note of the lack of affection or attention experienced by children in their homes due to parents who may not be emotionally or physically available to the child.

> Also, many kids do not get much affection at home and if you offer it to them at school they will gain a sense of

> belonging and purpose. We should also communicate and respond to them in a polite and acceptable way (Jessica).

From the above reflections it is apparent that inclusive teachers are able to address the individual needs of their learners more effectively when they establish positive relationships with all learners. Focusing on specific relationship building activities throughout the research cycles assisted the ALS to see the value of human relationships in research and learning.

Praxis: What we were doing

The purpose of reflection is not just to gain a deeper understanding of an issue, but to transform our classroom practice and ultimately make a difference in society (Rouhani, 2012; Freire, 2000). PALAR facilitates praxis – a product of iterative collaborative reflection and action in an attempt to effect positive societal change. The following reflections demonstrate how some of the members of the ALS were able to demonstrate praxis. Kaveri reflected on her enhanced awareness of diversity. She was now more careful in her speech and the selection of inclusive language.

> I am now aware about the differences children have, and how to meet the needs of different children. It gave me lot of understanding when it comes to different people and how to deal with them without treating them in a way that will feel unwelcome or as if they are different from other people. This gave me the understanding of how to speak using other types of language that will not offend another person or hurt other people's feels [feelings]. It contributed positive feelings and gave me enough knowledge about diverse children with diverse needs. Now I am able to work with children and I have good understanding of diversity and inclusion (Kaveri).

Annerly found that she was beginning to understand a deeper level of inclusion (Corbett & Slee, 2000; Petriwskyj, 2010). Although her classroom had displays of posters and greetings in different languages, she also found the need to get them to greet each other in different languages. This authentic inclusion went

deeper than just having physical displays, but actually including the greetings in different languages in their daily interactions.

> There are posters and greetings in my classroom with different languages. We not only have them displayed but we learn to greet each other in their different languages. These differences in language are not an inconvenience but something we all enjoy (Annerly).

Bahle reflected on how she was becoming more careful with children's names, and to her an important part of being inclusive meant learning to say their full names correctly without shortening their names.

> I find that we need to be careful with children's names. We should not shorten their names. As names have meanings. I feel that some teachers never made an attempt to learn how to say my name correctly. Others would shorten my name when I was in school. I felt strange being called differently at home and at school. I make an attempt to learn how to say their names correctly *(*Bahle).

Ranjeni also reflected on the need to align school activities with children's lived experiences where they can connect with the learning content. This is an example of culturally responsive teaching which aligns with inclusion, as pedagogical practices, teaching conceptions, and social relationships enhance social justice. Teachers relate the curriculum to children's backgrounds, establish connections with families, understand students' cultural experiences, establish connections with local communities, create shared learning experiences, and recognise cultural differences as strengths on which to build programs (Bassey, 2016).

> When we teach, we need to use examples from the child's life. We create a bridge between the child's home and school. If I teach early maths and I need counters, I will use what they have brought from home, even shapes I will say bring me a box from home. Use items like beans and pinecones as counters (Ranjeni).

Jessica emphasized that to her, being inclusive meant acknowledging the prior knowledge of learners and facilitating

pedagogical approaches where children were encouraged to provide input and participate in discussions instead of becoming passive receivers of knowledge (Freire, 2000).

> Acknowledging that the learners have prior knowledge, say to them 'as you may already know...'. Their input during lessons should be openly accepted and discussed in the classroom. This will help revisit their prior knowledge as well as build on it (Jessica).

According to Freire (2000) when learners are passive recipients of knowledge and teachers are depositors of knowledge, broader social hierarchies are mirrored. Education is seen as a tool to keep authority figures in power to dictate while at the same time limiting marginalized groups' agency and voices. This was also echoed by Bahle:

> Allowing the children to give contributions and speak their minds during discussions. Active listening should always be readily given as the children will not be afraid to speak to you, nor will they feel unheard. Children often feel very excited to share feedback and this excitement should not be warded off (Bahle).

When participants were reflecting, they also became conscientised to their own values and assumptions which led to an understanding of how this influenced their actions and interactions in not just their professional lives but their wider interactions with all people.

> I feel that before bringing about changes in the world or even expecting change from others you need to bring about change within yourself and your own thinking. I recently myself was feeling very low, my confidence was low because I cared about what other people saw in me and how others are better than me. But from here [this research] I came to believe in self-love, and this changed my thinking. I realized that the important thing that matters is how I see myself and that I should be happy and grateful to be me (Amina).

> I have become better because I have realised that some people who may appear different are actually very similar

> to me. My interactions with adults and the children have also improved. I can understand that sometimes people are not just disadvantaged in terms of abilities but also in terms of race, gender or language abilities and being poor (Lihle).

The above participant reflections were a clear representation of praxis. A result of the iterative process of reflection and action where theoretical knowledge is translated to practice (Freire, 2000). Participants demonstrated this praxis by firstly reflecting on their thoughts (theme 1) and emotions (theme 2). They then proceeded to institute change in their classrooms with a deeper transformation of their personal selves (theme 3).

Summary and concluding remarks

The study used a PALAR design to explore inclusion in ECCE. Guided by the head, heart and hands model of holistic learning and research, the findings firstly highlight that authentic inclusion is an inner journey that begins with teacher reflection, resulting in conscientisation, a process of becoming critically aware of the impact of one's past, on current ways of thinking about diversity, power and privilege. Secondly, the findings highlight the value of the affective domain, specifically the building of relationships creating people-centred research and child-centred inclusive classrooms. Thirdly, the iterative processes of collaborative reflection resulted in praxis where the ALS attempted to effect change in the early learning environment and pedagogical practice, resulting also in transformation of our personal selves. The study indicates the usefulness of PALAR to challenge traditional methods of knowledge creation by university researchers, as PALAR creates an inclusive and socially just research environment which empowers members of a community and values their voices.

I also now use the head, heart and hands model to categorise my own learnings from the PALAR project. In the cognitive domain, I improved my ability to reflect, acquire theoretical knowledge and improved my critical thinking skills to a greater degree. In the affective domain, I had to learn to accept uncertainty as PALAR

can be unpredictable as members of the ALS may respond in ways that do not fit into a well-planned research proposal. In fact, although universities require a research proposal prior to any research engagement, PALAR needs to be driven by the research group not a university approved research proposal. This was problematic as the ethical requirements for PhD research conflicted with the key principles of PALAR. In terms of the affective domain, I also improved my ability to manage group dynamics with greater emotional intelligence. In the psychomotor domain, this study enhanced my pedagogical skills. Despite being a teacher for twenty years, this project forced me to revisit my pedagogical approach from a traditional teacher-centred stance to one that encourages greater learner autonomy. All-in-all, this PALAR project has made an indelible mark on both my professional and personal development by contributing holistically to my positive transformation. Besides contributing to my development as the researcher, this project has also made valuable contributions in relevant theoretical and methodological domains.

I am hopeful that the knowledge presented in this article (although a small segment of a larger study) would be effective in assisting teachers to better understand important theoretical knowledge pertaining to the phenomenon of inclusion in ECCE. For teachers to be inclusive, they need to understand the role of power, privilege and diversity that operates insidiously in the classroom. Indeed, authentic inclusion is an inner journey where teachers are conscientised and reflect on their past to transform their current thinking. Only with a change in thinking can inclusion be practiced by developing sound relationships and transforming classroom practice. Methodologically, the study demonstrates how a PALAR design may be useful to facilitate Action Learning and Action Research to gather knowledge in a democratic, collaborative and inclusive manner. The ultimate contribution of this study is that children's lives could be bettered, particularly those who belong to marginalised groups vulnerable to exclusion.

Throughout my study I did make epistemic justice (McAteer & Wood, 2018) a central goal, however as the chief facilitator with an

already approved research plan, the outcome of the findings was influenced considerably by my own agenda and a preapproved research proposal that needed to be adhered to. Authentic PALAR research has no such researcher-driven agendas and are steered completely by the members of the ALS. Furthermore, this article reports on just a segment of the findings of a larger study (Mahadew, 2021). It is also essential to note that due to a small sample size the findings of this study are relevant only to the unique set of nine ALS members and their unique life contexts. Hence it would be incorrect to generalise these findings to the wider ECCE sector. Having said that, it is important to be mindful that ECCE centres in South Africa may experience similar issues that this study has addressed.

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Biography

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ALARj 29 (1) (2023) 83-102

Thesis Research Note: Supporting the sustainable development of Mexico: an investigation into the reorientation of undergraduate industrial design curriculum

Martha Elena Núñez López, Robert Huddleston, Geof Hill and Roberto Pablo Martínez Lozano

Abstract

Purpose *– The purpose of this paper is to report on a doctoral thesis in which Action Research was central in its methodology. The focus of the research was on supporting sustainable development in an undergraduate curriculum in México. The outcomes of the study exemplify the ability of practitioner-led Action Research to address complex problems across national and global sustainability agendas, involving the motivation and commitment of others in contributing to improving education for sustainable development in México.*

Research design *– This curriculum investigation was supported by practitioner-led Action Research.*

Findings *– The predominant finding from the research indicates that the use of multiple action cycles of curriculum inquiry and spin-off cycles supported the successful implementation of a new sustainable development curriculum in the Industrial Design*

(now Product Design) undergraduate programme at Tecnologico de Monterrey (TEC), in México.

***Originality / value** – Due to the communications revolution, researchers are now targeting the generation of flexible and online material for educational purposes. The design of effective digital tools has become important in developing relevant pedagogical methods and approaches. In parallel to the research, an online resource (Sostek) was developed with a focus on building accessible materials on Sustainable Development (SD), complementing the formal curriculum and supporting the participants in the curriculum investigation. It (Sostek) has started to enable communication and debate on pedagogical developments relevant to SD as well as sharing and promoting curriculum contents on the subject.*

Significantly, the gap in information resources in SD for Spanish-speaking students and citizens, found through research, led to the development of Sostek. This collaborative pedagogy is now filling this identified gap. It supports the new Product Design curriculum, informing SD actions in Product Design, Architecture, and other disciplines at TEC, and in other universities and communities.

Key words: Sustainable development, education for sustainable development, practitioner-led action research, higher education, university curriculum

A full copy of the thesis is located at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/19HoYRWUNizYXtauykbzZt9ZCbIr_CtVK/view?usp=sharing

What is known about the topic?

A gap in information resources in SD for Spanish-speaking students and citizens was found through the doctoral research that is being reported in this paper in which Action Research was central. The collaborative pedagogy that resulted from the research supports the new Design curriculum, informing and inspiring SD actions

What does this paper add?

The outcomes of the study exemplify the ability of practitioner-led action research to address complex problems across national and global sustainability agendas, involving the motivation and commitment of others in contributing to improving education for sustainable development in México.

Who will benefit from its content?

Any person who would like to integrate Action Research as a methodology for researching.

What is the relevance to AL and AR scholars and practitioners?

This research study contributes to professors and higher education institutions who may wish to improve the sustainable development initiatives and implement in their educational settings for supporting their students to gain experience on it.

Received March 2023 *Reviewed August 2023* *Published October 2023*

Introduction

This Thesis Research Report Note reports on a doctoral thesis that investigates the experimental development and implementation of a new Industrial Design curriculum at a Mexican university. The thesis centres on a curriculum inquiry conducted at Tecnologico de Monterrey (TEC), in México, under the auspices of a doctoral programme from Birmingham City University, U.K.

This paper comprises five sections, describing the research problem and practice, the inquirer's provenance, the doctoral programme, the research design and investigation findings.

In this report, a writing protocol has been adopted whereby when the thesis author is telling her own story, the text is indented and in italics.

The research problem and practice

Whatever problem or practice is examined or is identified as the focus of a doctoral investigation, it is contextualised in a discourse evident through a literature review. The review in this study situates the research problem and practice in interconnecting local, national and global contexts (Fallan & Lees-Maffei, 2015, p. 1). This educational case study addressed the 'quality education goal' of the government of México's National Development Plan, 2013 (PND) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2017, p. 1). In addressing these agendas, the study explored a framework of interrelating discourses on the profession and discipline of industrial design, sustainable development (SD) and education for sustainable development (ESD). While acknowledging the contested nature of the latter two, the curriculum investigation was aligned with Klarin's (2018, p. 68) view that:

> the concept of SD is based on the concept of development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints), the concept of needs (redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all) and the concept of future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations).

and with the UNESCO's standpoint that:

> education for sustainable development (ESD) requires the integration of sustainability content into the curriculum and that education requires changes in pedagogy, including the development of participatory approaches that can engage and motivate students and result in actions towards a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

The study centred on the Industrial Design program at TEC. The university is México's largest higher education institution, with thirty-six campuses located across the country's five zones. Concurrent with the research, the university was renewing its

curricula, aligned to the university's Tec21 Educational model (established in 2019). In this way, the development of the new Industrial Design curriculum at TEC, within the Tec21 Educational Model, provided the real-world context for the case study.

The university's Industrial Design programme is part of the Licenciatura (Bachelor's) degree, which is aligned to the Bologna process (Cepeda & Gascon, 2009). This programme was created by the architect and scholar Hermas Haaz in 2000. It was founded with the aim of educating professionals to design and develop new products, services and user-centred experiences within different industrial sectors. Graduates are expected to work in different companies, in social and environmental oriented organisations and in the government; they are also expected to contribute to organisations, as independent external consultants or as entrepreneurs through their own company based on design (TEC, 2016).

In the light of a global conversation about sustainability, a challenge for higher education institutes is whether, when introducing SD curricula, their students and the broader community see their curricula as relevant and practical. Consideration of this challenge led the focus of the inquiry to the research question:

> In what ways can innovations in Design Education, for Sustainable Development (in higher education), contribute to developing 'relevant learning objectives and learning contents' toward achieving the 'quality education goal' of México (Government of the Mexican Republic, 2013).

Inquirer's provenance

In addition to a discursive framing, part of practitioner-led Action Research (Stenhouse, 1975) is acknowledging that the inquirer carries into their nominated inquiry, knowledge and attitudes pertinent to the topic they are investigating. Schön (1983) describes this foundational reflection as 'troubling'. Practice-led inquiry literature refers to it as provenance (Hill and Lloyd, 2018).

The inquirer's provenance story

I began my higher education study in Architecture as an undergraduate student at TEC in August 1994.

I received a 90% scholarship to study at the university's high school and undergraduate programme in Architecture. Subsequently I gained a 100% scholarship to study for a Master of Science degree in Civil Engineering and Construction Management, and a few years later, after becoming a teacher at TEC, I received further support from the University, equivalent to 100%, to obtain a second taught postgraduate degree in Industrial Design and Product Innovation.

After graduating from the undergraduate Architecture programme, I worked for three years (1999-2002) in an 'architecture buffet'. This work involved teaching courses on various architectural software and it was through this experience that I discovered my interest in teaching. Concurrent with this employment, I studied for the Civil Engineering and Construction Management programme and undertook architectural projects (2000-2001). I undertook a second Master's degree (Industrial Design and Product Innovation), which enabled me to teach in that discipline.

I approached this PhD study with a firm belief that more research efforts were needed to improve education for sustainable development (ESD) in México, and that as a professor in Industrial Design at TEC, an opportunity existed to contribute to addressing this gap by reorientating the undergraduate curriculum in this discipline.

Doctoral programme

The doctoral programme through which this curriculum inquiry was undertaken is one at Birmingham City University (BCU), a post-1992 UK university located in the Midlands of England. Students conducting a BCU PhD are required, in the first part of the study, to undertake a Post Graduate Certificate (PGC). This exposes candidates to research practice, with a focus on research methods (specific to the area of study) and the literature review, to support their emergence as researchers.

As is common with doctoral programmes, the candidate is supported with a research supervision team. For this study, the candidate was living in México. Therefore, in addition to a Birmingham based supervision team, it was seen as an advantage for the researcher to be supported by a local supervisor, in México. One of the special supervisory arrangements for BCU distance learners is to provide a local supervisor. As part of this arrangement, in addition to weekly group meetings, the local supervisor and candidate met after each group meeting to review progress and support the planning of the implementation of the curriculum investigation at TEC. Although this investigation was exploring sustainable development, its focus on a curriculum called for supervision in the discipline of education, as well as design.

Each doctoral investigation is individual. Undertaking a study, as in this case, which uses an Action Research approach invites not only knowledge about this approach but also impacts on the research process. For example, in line with a research problem that emerges as the inquirer engages with that problem, a supervisory team, together with the inquirer, need to be responsive to the variations in practice that may proceed from the research process.

The McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) Action Research model refers to 'spin offs' and in the process of supervising this thesis there was the capacity for spin offs. These addressed developing identifications of the research problem as the review of literature and participant engagement were undertaken.

Supervisory meetings explored the design of the curriculum interventions and their subsequent findings. This meant responding to new ideas as they emerged, including the suggestion to include walking interviews as one of the research methods and study variations arising from the candidate's distance learning arrangements. One of these variations, when the candidate was studying in Birmingham, enabled face-to-face supervisory meetings (for the supervisors based in Birmingham) and meetings with experts in the UK, such as the Director of the Royal Society of Arts Students Awards. They also involved new

opportunities, such as the call for chapter proposals for a United Nations book on sustainable development.

Research design

As identified earlier, the research was motivated by the candidate's belief that fundamental curriculum change was needed to support the sustainable development of México (Núñez, Huddleston and Lozano, 2020). This led to a focus, during the 'reconnaissance' phase of the study on Action Research. The focus on a curriculum initially identified the possibility of a case study as the methodology, but with the case study unfolding within a broader organisational context, it was felt that Action Research provided a viable methodology for exploring the curriculum intervention. In Swann's paper, *Action Research and the Practice of Design*, the author explores the ways in which Action Research is relevant to the 'interpretive nature of design' and defines Action Research as 'a program for change in a social situation' (Swann, 2002, p.50).

Reconnaissance

During the reconnaissance period of this study (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 2003, p.16), the inquirer recognised that fundamental curriculum change would be needed to contribute to improving the Sustainable Development of México (Núñez, et al., 2020). This view was informed by the inquirer's experience of teaching on the Industrial Design program and contributing to local and national educational debates.

The reconnaissance period also involved an extensive literature review, which outlined the government of México's quality education goal (Government of the Mexican Republic, 2013). This national context was then discussed in relation to local, national and international discourses on SD and ESD. In this way, the review of the literature investigated a range of perspectives and how they inform the development of this Curriculum Inquiry (or research) at TEC, in México. The review included literature on practitioner-led Action Research (Stenhouse, 1975) to support the candidate in using her own educational experiences to investigate

the specific curriculum at TEC to improve the situation (Creswell, 2014).

In addition to the use of traditional sources of literature, an Action Research approach invites the participation of the stakeholders in the research, in the case of this study, establishing local and national perspectives. During the reconnaissance period, it became evident that Action Research would provide a viable methodology for this research. Starting with a definition of 'practitioner-led action inquiry' (Stenhouse, 1975) and recognising action research as a broad school of thought (Reason and Bradbury, 2008), different views of Action Research were identified. As the study developed, these were aligned with the real-world situation of the study to formulate what they meant for establishing a methodology for the research in practice.

Action research cycles

The research design for this case study implemented Action Research cycles (McNiff et al., 2003, p. 23). The table below outlines the three cycles of the research and the methods used in each cycle.

Figure 1: Three Action Research Cycles

Cycles		Methods
1	Curriculum Scoping	Interviews with Experts in México and the UK
		A Community of Practice Seminar, Birmingham
		A Nationwide Questionnaire: collection of data on existing SD learning teaching approaches in Design in Higher Education in México

Cycles		Methods
		Interviews at TEC: students, graduates and professors from four different campuses of TEC
2	Curriculum Interventions	Students Course Surveys Implementing SD Competencies (Competency-Based Education)
3	Focus Groups	The main findings from the Curriculum Investigation were presented to Focus Groups (the participants / stakeholders in the inquiry). The participants in these groups were invited to discuss their reflections and opinions on the relevance and validity of the outcomes of the research.

The investigation involved the participation of multiple stakeholders. This led to the design and use of interviews and questionnaires in Cycle 1 and Focus Groups in Cycle 3. Findings from Cycle 1 narrowed the focus of the study to developing pedagogies to support the participants in Cycle 2. One of the methods used in Cycle 2 was Student Course Surveys, which required the development and use of SD competencies. Student Course Surveys, were used by TEC to support the development of the university's new curricula (TEC 21 Educational Model),

The table below (Figure 2) presents how Action Research was used as a methodology in promoting the generation of knowledge and the development of educational methods and strategies as the cycles were carried out. It shows:

- the timing of the Action Research cycles in parallel with the TEC calendar,

- how SD competencies (informed by Cycle 1) were implemented in the Curriculum Interventions in Cycle 2; before the university implemented Competency Based Education (CBE), within the TEC21 Educational Model, and
- the timing of the creation of an online SD resource to support the participants in the Curriculum Interventions (the Spin-off cycle).

Figure 2: The Timing of the Research in Relation to the TEC Calendar

TEC Calendar		**Action Research Cycles**	
Fall Semester	Spring Semester	Cycle	Cycles
August - December 2016	January – May 2017	1	Curriculum Scoping
Aug 2017 – Dec 2017	January – May 2018		
Aug 2018 – Dec 2018	January - May 2019	2	First Curriculum Intervention (Industrial Design) / Student Surveys / implementing SD competencies Spin-off: online SD resource (Sostek) Second Curriculum Intervention (Industrial Design) / Student Surveys / implementing SD competencies

TEC Calendar		Action Research Cycles	
Start of the TEC Educational Model / Implementation of Competency Based Education			
Aug 2019 – Dec 2019	February - June 2020	2	Third Curriculum Intervention (Industrial Design and Architecture) / Student Surveys / implementing SD competencies
February – June 2020		3	Focus Groups

In the earlier cycles, a gap in information resources in SD for Spanish-speaking students and citizens was identified. This led to the development, as a spin-off from the main curriculum investigation, of an online resource with a focus on building accessible materials on SD (Sostek). As the next table shows (Figure 3), this spin-off generated its own set of Action Research cycles.

Figure 3 - The Spin-off cycle

TEC Calendar		Curriculum Investigation	
Fall Semester	Spring Semester	Spin-off Cycles	
Aug 2018 – Dec 2018	January - May 2019	1	First and Second Curriculum Interventions Submission to TEC of the first NOVUS proposal to support the participants in the Curriculum Interventions https://novus.tec.mx/en

TEC Calendar		Curriculum Investigation	
Aug 2019 – Dec 2019	January - May 2020	2	Third Curriculum Intervention Acceptance by TEC of the first NOVUS proposal and start of actions to develop Sostek
Aug 2020 – Dec 2020	January - May 2021	3	Sostek actions: development of a webpage, SD project test, blog and game Submission to TEC
Aug 2021 – Dec 2021	January - May 2022	4	Submission of the thesis and Graduation Ceremony Acceptance by TEC of the second NOVUS proposal / development of Sostek APP

Investigation findings

The reconnaissance period of the study led to planning and implementing Action Research cycles and in line with the McNiff model, findings brought about other spontaneous discoveries (spin-off cycles). These Action Research notes have highlighted one of these, the online SD resource (Sostek) as a platform for contributing to supporting SD by disseminating the results of the research and promoting learning and reflection.

As the table above shows (Figure 3), a significant moment for the investigation was a successful application to TEC's Institute for the Future of Education, NOVUS. The purpose of this initiative is to encourage educational experimentation and research in educational innovation. Funding from NOVUS enabled the development of the online SD resource (Sostek), in parallel with the doctoral programme.

As highlighted above, the initial purpose of the resource was to fill the gap in SD information resources for the students and professors participating in the interventions. However, the ambition for Sostek increased as opportunities emerged during the study, including the adoption of the model by other universities, professional organisations. Communication and publication activities undertaken during the research combined with Sostek to provide a foundation for future efforts to address the existing gap in SD / ESD resources for Spanish-speaking communities in México and other developing countries.

The findings from this research are informing pedagogy in other departments at TEC and universities in México, demonstrating the transferability of Action Research methodology, as used in this case study. The findings also exemplify the ability of practitioner-led research to address complex problems across national and global sustainability agendas, involving the motivation and commitment of others in contributing to improving education for sustainable development in México.

The authors of this paper observed that Action Research enabled the candidate to develop her own repertoire of research methods and as the research developed, invited observations and critical reflections on their implementation during the research.

Reflection on the candidature

Candidate's reflections

> I undertook the doctoral programme as a part time student. This mode of study turned out to be valuable as it created the possibility for me to investigate the Industrial Design curriculum at TEC, at the same time as undertaking my role as a professor and a parent.
>
> During each summer of the doctoral programme (2017 to 2019), I travelled from México to Birmingham. These visits involved face-to face meetings with my supervisors (based in the UK) as well as with students in Design and Architecture, including other research degree students, teachers and professors. For example, a Community of

Practice seminar was held in 2017. I used this seminar to present the progress of the first year of my research, and I was able to gather viewpoints directly from the participants to support the design of the following cycles of the investigation. The visits to Birmingham City University also facilitated wider communications, for example, with Lawrence Green, an expert in design and innovation.

After submitting my PhD thesis (2022), I received an assignment from the Director of the Department of Industrial Design at TEC, to guide a seventh semester Design student in a 400-hour research stay. The focus of the research stay was on educational innovation to promote education for sustainable development in the Design curriculum. As a result of the stay, the student wrote a paper that has been accepted to be presented at an International Scopus Conference (March 2023).

During the final phase of the research, in 2019, I was appointed Director of the Industrial Design programme at TEC's campus in Monterrey. Once in Monterrey, the Director of the Department supported the continuation of the research, including conducting curricula interventions and Student Course Surveys.

After the doctoral programme, Sostek gained international recognition for educational innovation when it won a regional silver award at the Reimagine Education Awards conference, organised by the QS Ranking and Wharton University in the United States (December 2022).

My plan is to continue conducting and guiding research focused on more efficiently promoting learning and reflection on Sustainable Development.

Supervisors' reflections on the candidature

There is something energising for a supervisor when moving between the theory and actual practice of research, particularly when the research needs to solve problems as they are happening in real-world situations. This was evident in the very early phases of the candidature, while the candidate was reading literature on curricula in relation to the need for research to be responsive to the stakeholders.

That is, it became evident that there was a basis to introduce the candidate to certain literature on Action Research as a potential methodology for supporting and managing the collaborative objectives of the investigation. The choice to adopt Action Research as a methodology then shifted the nature of the supervision, so that the supervision practices were harmonious with the principles of Action Research.

Supervising an Action Research inquiry brings the added challenge, but also advantage, that elements of the research are unpredictable. As such, Action Research requires collaborators to constantly revisit their ideas about how to achieve the objectives, which at different moments in the research, are perceived be important to achieve.

One of the valuable experiences in supervising this research was that it brought into reality how spin-offs can occur in an Action Research study. This reality is well described in Action Research literature (McNiff et al., 2003), but when it happens, it requires a supervisor to go with what may appear to be a different direction. Spin-offs can be thought of as opportunistic, but for a supervisor, they can reinforce the often-unspoken aspect of all research, that regardless of whether the endeavour is Action Research or even a positivist study, the very nature of research is that the outcome cannot be predicted and so each stakeholder must be ready to be spontaneous and inventive, sometimes in quite troubling situations.

The other significant advantage in this study was the international composition of the stakeholders. The curriculum investigation was undertaken in México, under the auspices of a UK doctoral degree with supervisors from the U.K., Australia and México, creating many opportunities to learn, from different perspectives, about ways of working.

The local supervisor in México had the opportunity to closely follow the journey of the investigation as it was mainly carried out at TEC's Puebla campus, where the local supervisor is Head of the Math and Technology Department at the High School of Tec de Monterrey in Puebla.

The supervisors from the UK, Australia, and México, met regularly with the candidate to discuss progress and the next steps to take. After each meeting, the local supervisor met with the candidate to support the planning of these steps, involving the collaboration and participation of the stakeholders in the research. These follow-up meetings were important in reflecting on the application of the candidate's Action Research methodology, in the context of the university and the wider ramifications of the study for improving education for sustainable development in México.

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Biography

Program Director at Tecnologico de Monterrey, Monterrey campus, Mexico. PhD by Birmingham City University, UK, research: "Supporting the Sustainable Development of Mexico: Reorienting the Curriculum in Higher Education Toward Integrating Sustainable Development". Leader of Sostek, a platform developed to promote Sustainability in higher education which won silver at the QS Reimagine Education, 2022. Experience in internationalization

initiatives in higher education: global Classroom (COIL), organization of summer programs abroad, hiring of visiting professors, participation of students in international competitions, among others.

Since graduating from the Royal College of Art, Robert Huddleston has taught art and design disciplines at the University of Southampton (UoS) and Birmingham City University (BCU). He has provided leadership on curriculum development for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. He was Associate Dean, Academic Quality and Student Learning Experience (Faculty of Arts, Design and Media) at BCU from 2013—16. Interconnecting with his academic career, Robert has designed printed textiles and in recent years collaborated with the lens-based designer Dan Brackenbury on a photographic monograph, recording changing urban environments in Dalian, China.

Dr Geof Hill SFHEA is the manager of The Investigative Practitioner consultancy in Brisbane, Australia. He was Education Reader at Birmingham (U.K.) City University between 2015 and 2018 and prior to that, Co-ordinator of Research Supervision Professional Development for Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane (Australia). Geof is the principal author and instigator of 'the research supervisor's friend' – a Wordpress blog - (http://supervisorsfriend.wordpress.com/) and one of the inaugural editors for Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education (ASRHE) (https://asrhe.org).

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Thoughtlet:
Linking theory and practice: Action Science

Bob Dick

Received September 2023 Reviewed October 2023 Published October 2023

A simple question and a simple, but surprising, answer provide the foundation for the substantial theoretical and practical framework now known as Action Science. This brief paper sets out the framework, the question and answer, and some practical implications for Action Learning and Action Research. Later, I also suggest that it has even more relevance now than it did when it was first developed.

The Action Science framework

The Action Science framework links together within-person, between-person and system dynamics. It is driven by our inner assumptions and motivations interacting with our external actions as we relate to others. Such behaviour can influence actions in the immediate group or team, and beyond that, the organisation or community. Researchers and practitioners in Action Learning and Action Research can thus understand and perhaps intervene in those dynamics at any or all levels.

The theory-practice link is explained in part by two "theories of action" that people hold. In 1974, Chris Argyris and Don Schön labelled them "Model I" and "Model II". Model I is a person's *theory-in-use*, the (usually tacit) theory that underpins self-protective actions. Model II is their *espoused theory*, the values they believe guide their actions. I'll use Roger Schwarz's more evocative labels of "unilateral control" for Model I and "mutual learning" for Model II.

Mutual learning is our constructive theory of action. We espouse it to others and — importantly — to ourselves. Varying somewhat from person to person, at best it is characterised by collaboration, openness, and shared goals. Unilateral control instead seeks to meet individual goals by controlling process and information:

Unilateral control	Mutual learning
Define and pursue goals	Valid information
Win, don't lose	Free and informed choice
Be (or appear) rational	Commit to decisions made

People's theories-in-use can guide their interaction without their awareness. The role of the two theories of action became evident early in Argyris's work, as we will see.

The driving question and unexpected answer

The question that motivated so much of Argyris's work was this: why do so many attempts to improve a relationship or a system actually make it worse? As Argyris (1985, p. x) wrote:

> Why is it that when a difficult and threatening problem is correctly diagnosed, when a valid implementation plan is designed, when the resources are available, the implementation may fall short of everyone's expectations?

The answer was surprising. At first, Argyris was sceptical. Eventually the sheer volume of evidence persuaded him. When we are stressed or embarrassed, a gap opens up between how we believe we behave (our mutual learning theory of action) and our actual behaviour (driven by our unilateral control theory of action). We remain unaware of the gap.

Science now has a better theoretical understanding of this gap and its operation. The existence of other bodies of evidence and theory are for me part of the support for Argyris's ideas. Two examples are evolutionary theory and neuroscience.

For example, evolutionary theory accepts that when we (or other species) are threatened, self-protective acts are automatic. The more primitive parts of our brain have a fast connection to our senses. They operate unilaterally. Daniel Goleman (1995) popularised this as the *amygdala hijack*. It is also consistent with current theory in neuroscience — see Neuberg et al. (2011).

Argyris also provides several conceptual tools to assist understanding. The ladder of inference is a useful example (Argyris et al., 1985). It allows easier exploration of the links between the within-person and between-person dynamics of interactions.

Ladder of inference

The ladder of inference summarises the stages of the process of turning perceptual experience into meaning, and then into action. Imagine a 4-rung ladder with the feet in the flood of information that is reality. Only some of that flood is perceived. That limited sample provides the basis for what follows. The four rungs are:

1. *observable data* — the sample of data actually observed;
2. *cultural meaning* — the conventional meaning of the observed data;
3. *attributed meaning* — the implications for the person of the meaning;
4. *reaction* — how the perceiver reacts in response.

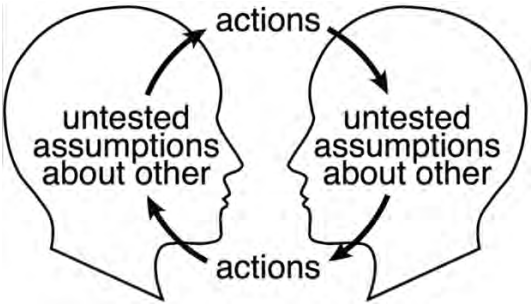
For me, and I assume for everyone, rungs 1 and 2 occur simultaneously, or nearly so. I don't consciously see or hear the *raw* sounds or sights. I see someone approach, enter, start and drive a car. I hear footsteps, a car door opening and closing, and a car starting up and driving off. Often, I don't even have the language to describe the raw data that underpins the cultural meaning. It happens automatically.

At rung 3, attributed meaning, the theory of action comes into play. We apply one of our two theories of action to interpret the

meaning for ourselves. Often, our assumptions about another person's motives are a central part of this. For example, I might assume that the car driver left because something I said offended them, and that their departure was their response.

Not expressed explicitly, these assumptions mostly remain untested and untestable — undiscussable. Not only that, but their undiscussability is itself undiscussable. Argyris called it the cover-up of the cover-up.

At rung four, reaction, we act on the meaning we have attributed at rung three. For example, I may decide that the driver has sacrificed any right to my assistance and that I will dismiss any further approach.



Every person has an espoused theory and a theory-in-use. Each may interpret the other's actions as supporting already-formed assumptions about the person. An iterative rung-3/rung 4-cycle may result, and perhaps a *mutual* self-fulfilling prophecy and an improving or worsening relationship.

That's the two-person version of an interaction. In two further books, in 1978 and 1996, Argyris and Schön extended their theory of action models more explicitly to organisational level as "Model O-I" and "Model O-II". Roger Schwarz's substitute labels of unilateral control and mutual learning still fit.

Whole-organisation theories of action

Models O-I and O-II are a direct extension of their individual counterparts. As before, Argyris and Schön also provide a rationale for their offerings, and practical ways of applying them in practice.

One further point about this deserves notice. In their 1978 book, neither of the authors knew directly of an organisation they regarded as O-II — not one. To judge from their 1996 book *Organizational learning II*, eighteen years later they still knew of no examples. Mutual learning at organisational level is rare.

Other authors and practitioners have extended the work of Argyris and Schön. In the interests of brevity I will mention only three: Peter Senge (1990), Diana Smith (2011) and Roger Schwarz (1994, 2013).

Developments by other authors

Peter Senge has been successful in broadening the appeal of Argyris's work by adopting more accessible language. In particular, he frames theories of action as *mental models*. He believes that they underpin actual behaviour, as did Argyris.

Argyris mentored Diana Smith, a strong supporter of his. In her work she engages clients more collaboratively than Argyris typically did. In this way she reduces the defensiveness she noticed in many clients' responses to Argyris himself.

Roger Schwarz stays very close to Argyris's models. He applies them by first teaching clients eight simple behaviours that function as guidelines. They are concrete enough to be easily monitored. The behaviours convert their interactions from unilateral control to mutual learning.

In my own work, I've been exploring two further extensions.

Two further possible developments

Argyris assumed that the two theories of action, espoused and in-use, exist as a binary choice. Instead, I treat them as the end points of a continuum. People and teams can move along the continuum, achievable change by achievable change, towards mutual learning.

In some recent work I've also assumed that the concepts and practices of Action Science have recently increased in relevance. Our organisations and communities often seem to me to be mired in bureaucratic ways of relating and working, even as those ways increasingly fail. Recognising the need for change, some organisations do try to escape to something better — mostly without success. I believe that more attention to the two theories of action, espoused and in-use, can surface and help to resolve the issues that otherwise undermine the necessary attempts at improvement.

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Biography

Bob Dick is an independent scholar, an occasional academic, and a researcher and practitioner, coach and advisor. He works in the fields of community and organisational change. In this work he uses highly participatory versions of action research and action learning. These approaches enable him to help people, communities and organisations to understand and improve their functioning.

In the past he has had academic appointments at the University of Queensland, Griffith University and Southern Cross University, using experiential methods to help people learn research and consultancy skills.

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