



**ALARA World Congress
Pretoria, 4th-7th Nov 2014**

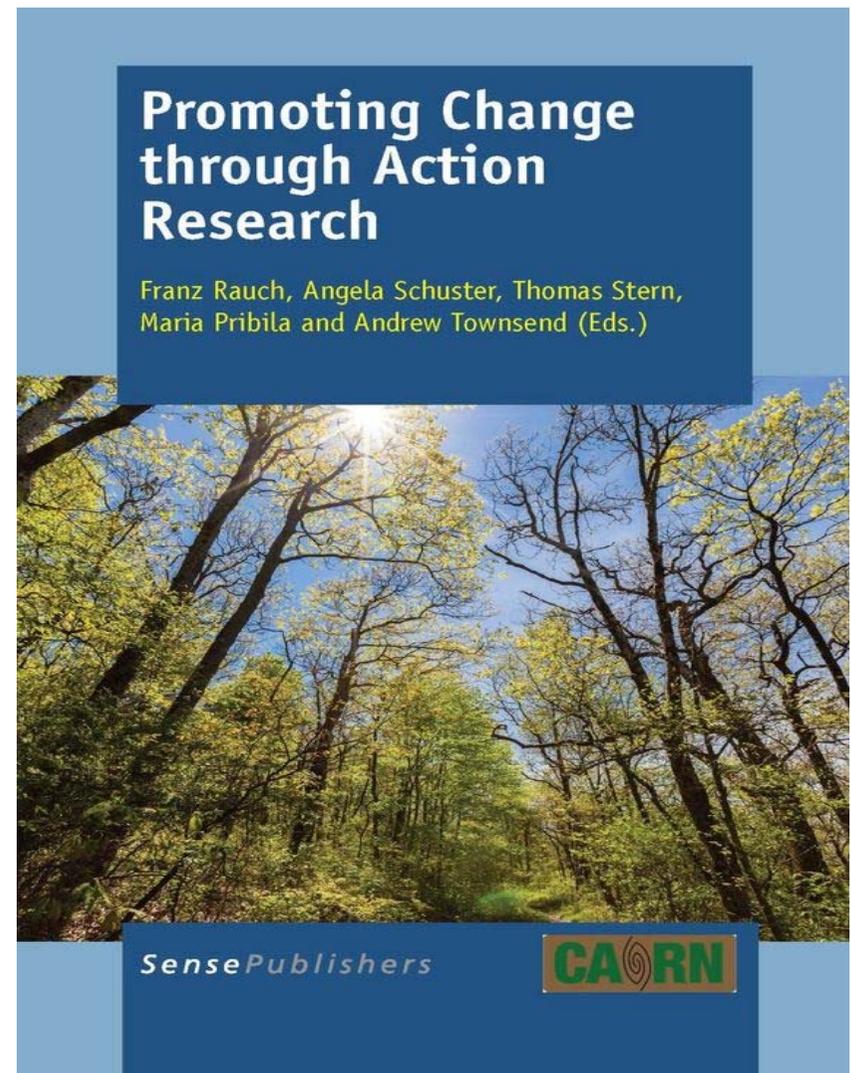
SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

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**INSTITUT für UNTERRICHTS-
SCHULENTWICKLUNG**



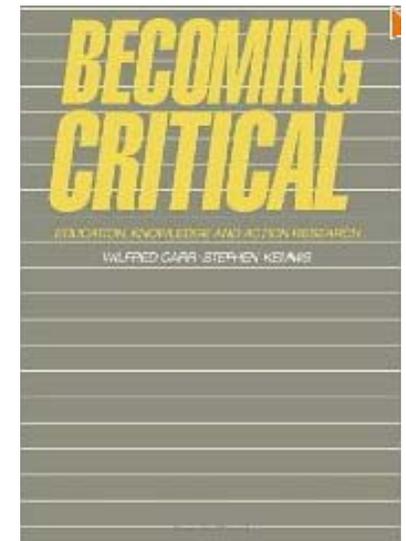
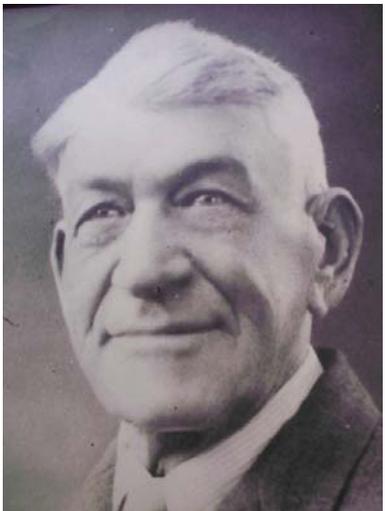


Action Research Is Transformative



“Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.”

(Carr & Kemmis 1986: 162).



Action Research Is Committed to a Humanistic Value System



- Civil society & Democracy
- Participation & Inclusion
- Justice & Equity
- Progress & Emancipation
- Respect & Pluralism

How it all began

CARN CONFERENCE 2011
(COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK)
BRINGING A DIFFERENT WORLD INTO EXISTENCE



4th - 6th
November
2011
Vienna



International Perspectives ...

Authors from

- Austria
- Canada
- Germany
- Greece
- Israel
- UK

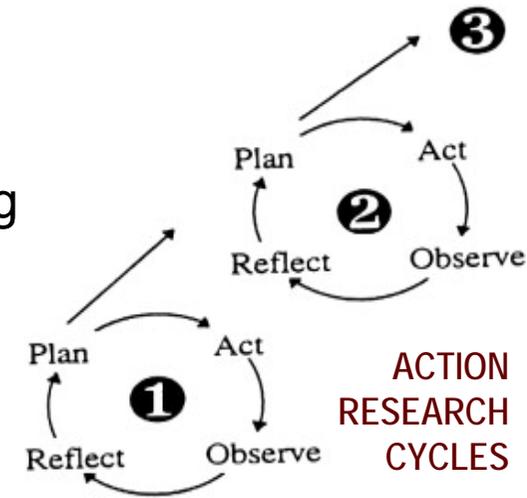
... Across Disciplines

Studies about **innovative projects and systemic change**

- Community development
- Education (secondary / tertiary)
 - Health & Care
 - Social work

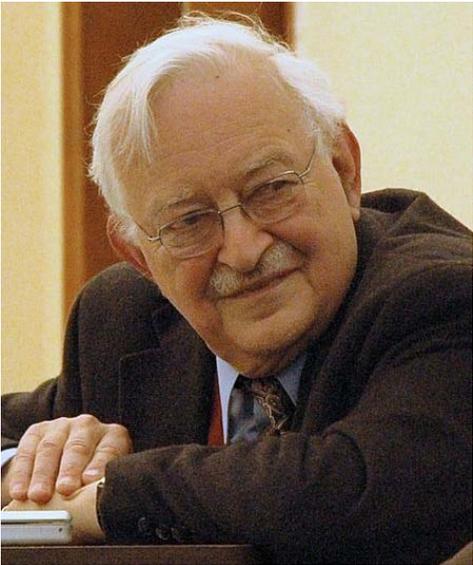
Common features of selected contributions

- Action research: Investigation of practical matters / social contexts. **Cyclic process plan-act-observe-reflect.** Relevant results. Sharing knowledge. Ethical code (ownership of data and outcomes?)
- Reflection about impact of research process & results: *“Bringing a different world into existence”* through innovation and change → **Orientation towards development**
- Research partnership: Participation/Collaboration → **Empowerment**
- Close interrelation praxis ↔ theory (social science, epistemology, methodology: e.g. Bourdieu, Bhaba, Toulmin ...)
- Various contexts & dimensions: from classroom to educational system (PFL/ProFiL/IMST); from local initiatives to international networks & institutions (ICPHR) → **Systemic change**



What is Empowerment?

“Empowerment is a process by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives.”
(*“Having rights but no resources and no services available is a cruel joke.”*) (Julian Rappaport 1984)



“Empowerment is a social-action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice.” (Immanuel Wallerstein 1992)



Katherine Froggatt et al. (UK): *Addressing end of life issues through peer education and action research*

Design: Workshops with old people in Lancashire: Confronting finiteness of life. Writing last will. Reorganizing priorities. Making plans.

Process: Including participants as partners at all stages, raising their consciousness, drawing from their knowledge & wisdom.

Results: Portfolio templates for reflection of end-of-life issues. Public workshops organised with partners. Suggestions for local initiatives. Empowerment.

Exemplary insights into:

- the thinking & acting of old people;
- how to get access to it through PAR;
- how to influence community politics.

Raluca Verweijen-Slamnescu & Sharn Bowley et al. (Austria/UK): *Empowering young care leavers through peer research*

Design: Workshops for young people leaving care at SOS children villages in four countries (Alb, Cz, Pol, Fin): interviews, data analysis, drawing conclusions.

Process: Training of Communication skills. Including participants as partners at all stages, drawing from their knowledge & enthusiasm. Ethics framework.

Results: SOS/EU-Report with suggestions for improvement of transition procedures, e.g. advance notice & preparation. Empowerment.

Exemplary insights into:

- the situation of young people in care institutions (longings, fears, abuse ...) and their needs when they leave;
- how PAR can help to acquire skills and self esteem;
- how social scientists, practitioners and young people can cooperate in a research project

WHEN CARE ENDS LESSONS FROM PEER RESEARCH

INSIGHTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE ON LEAVING CARE
IN ALBANIA, THE CZECH REPUBLIC, FINLAND, AND POLAND



EDITED BY MIKE STEIN AND RALUCA VERWEIJEN-SLAMNESCU



Photo by shale.com, Ardy Peters

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Practical & Ethical Criteria for Action Research

(Reason & Heron 2008²)

① **Good Action Research pursues worthwhile practical purposes**

- ⇒ solutions for authentic problems; sharing relevant knowledge;
- ⇒ humanistic value system

② **Good action research is collaborative / participatory**

- ⇒ involving stakeholders; 'critical friends';
- ⇒ ethical rules (not 'on' but 'with' people; ownership);

③ **Good action research is responsive and developmental**

- ⇒ series of research-and-development cycles; feedback;
- ⇒ different perspectives; empowerment

④ **Good action research connects theory and praxis**

- ⇒ balancing action and reflection; generating theoretical knowledge and promoting practical improvements.

Psychoanalytic Approach and Empowerment



- **Being aware of the power of unconscious motifs** within our actions and interactions (Sigmund Freud)



- **Understanding defence mechanisms** in order to reduce anxiety generated by threats from unacceptable or negative impulses (Melanie Klein)



- **Becoming more reflective** than reactive; comprehending the significance of group processes (Wilfred Bion)

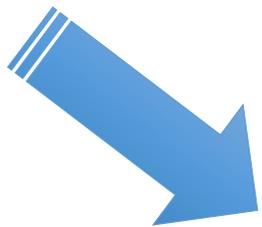
“Work Discussion“

Psychoanalytic *self*-observation delves into

- **personal actions and feelings**
- **systematic questioning of interaction patterns**
- **group/organizational dynamics at work.**



Martha Harris



*Personal development → Professionalism
→ New models of interaction
→ Organizational development → Social change*

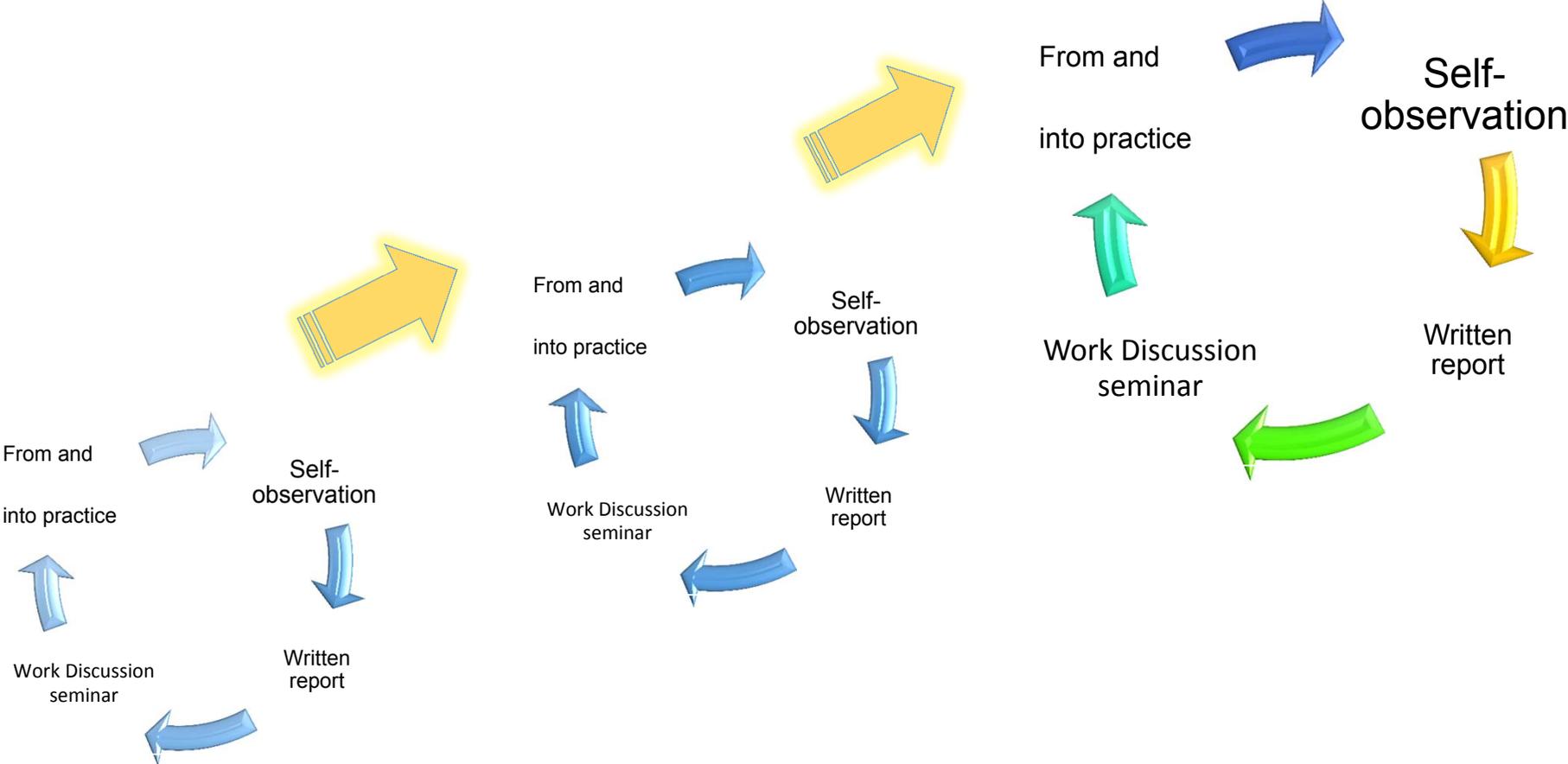
The “Work Discussion“ Method in Teacher Education



1. Self-observation in practice (e.g. a lesson, team-meeting, parents' evening)
2. Descriptive/narrative/reflective written report
3. Systematic discussion: research within groups of professionals and a seminar leader.



Cycle of Reflection and Understanding



Looking Deeper into the Dynamics of Emotions in a Professional Setting

Questioning
behavioural routines

Analysing fears and
feelings of being
threatened

Uncovering
misinterpretations that
lead to hasty emotional
acting

Aiming at getting in
touch with emotional
self

Understanding psycho-
dynamics within the
group/organization and
acting more
consciously

Example of Work Discussion (1):

Complaints of the teaching staff

- A school principal is confronted with complaints of her teaching staff about excessive demands caused by their massive work load. She feels under pressure to act in her role as a leader and to be an authority.
- The school is pressured by structural changes. The principal tackles most of the challenges by herself.
- She tries to find quick solutions for problems. But the staff continues to moan about excessive demands on them.



**Written
report**

Example of Work Discussion (2):

Analysing the case / Scrutinising the written report

- The school principal recognized that she didn't have *emotional* contact with the teaching staff, but rather persisted in her own thoughts and feelings.
- Through response from the research group and by critically analysing her report, she realized that she had not been able to contain the fears of the teaching staff.
- Furthermore she had plunged into work, not informing the staff about processes while trying to be a role model in coping with an enormous work load - thus raising even more fear of being overstrained within the staff.

Example of Work Discussion (3):

Field of development

Personal development

- Pausing and reflecting instead of judging and acting too quickly
- Observing herself → becoming calmer
- Learning to contain unconscious urges and feelings

Organizational development

- More time and adequate space for team communication
- Transparent information policy towards the teaching staff

... and the Next Steps



Organising a *Work Discussion* group
in the school

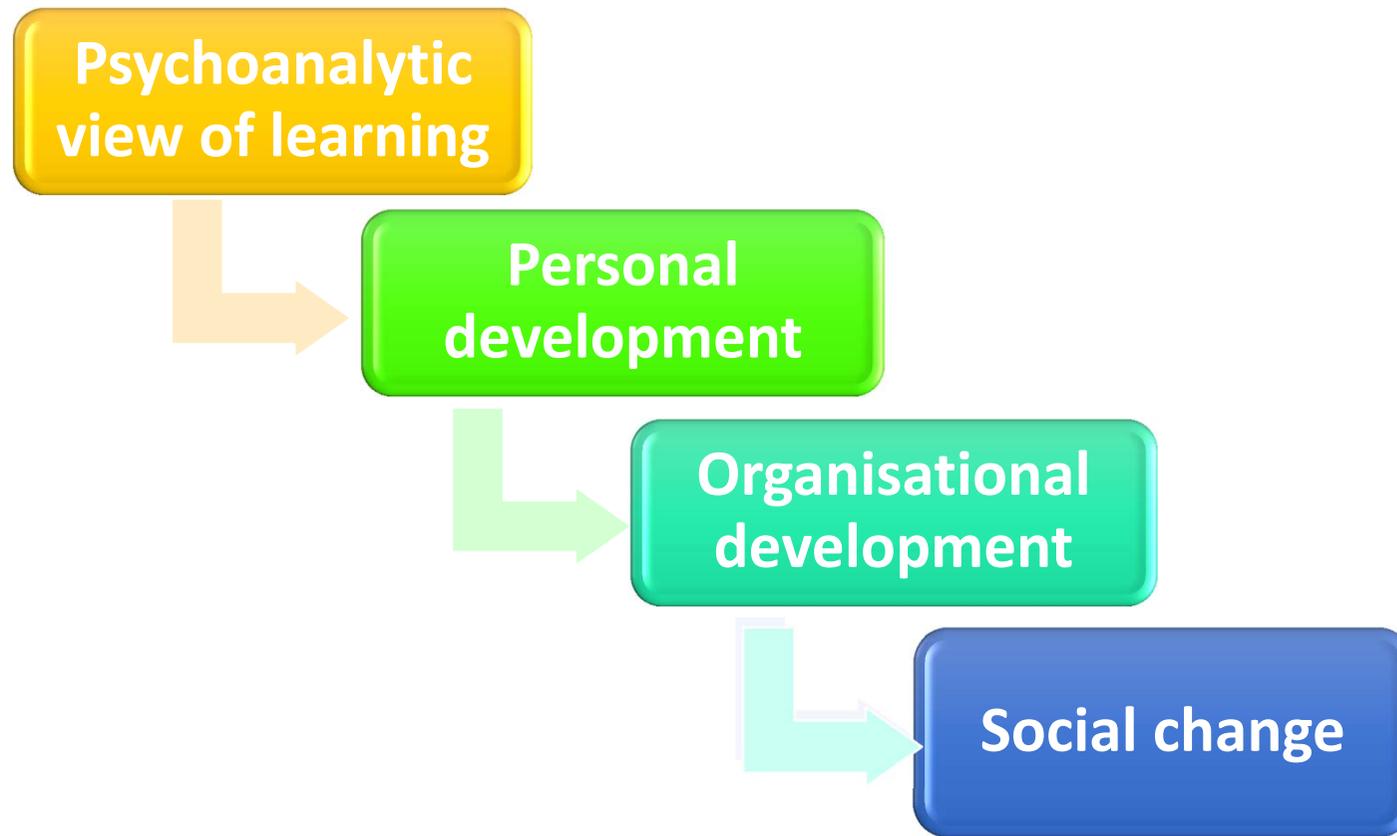


Using the *Work Discussion* group for
ongoing school development processes



Aim: Implementing *Work Discussion*
in teacher education

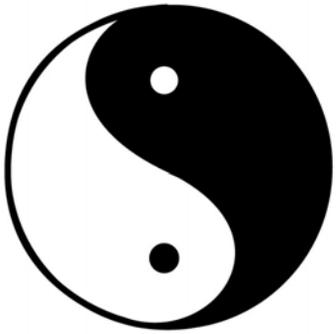
Psychoanalytic Theory and “Work Discussion“ as Starting Points for Social Change?



Twofold dialectics of change

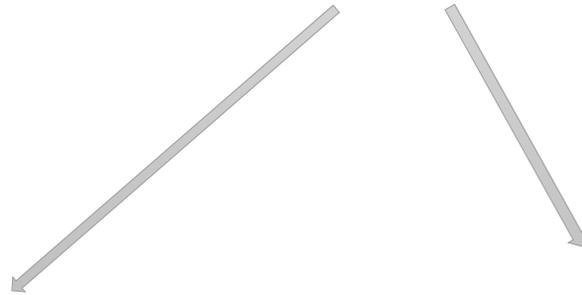
TOP
DOWN
↓

Systemic
change

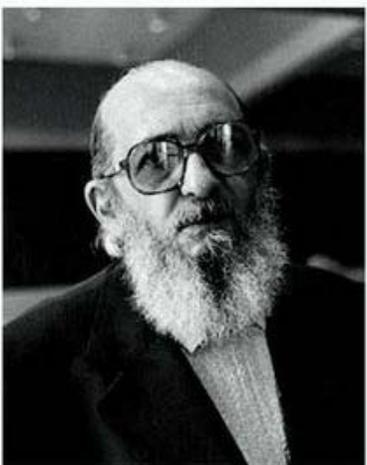


Local
initiatives

↑
BOTTOM
UP



Michael Fullan: "Theory of change"



No one educates anyone else
nor do we educate ourselves,
we educate one another in
communion in the context of
living in this world.

~ Paulo Freire



**“EDUCATION
IS THE MOST POWERFUL
WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO
CHANGE THE WORLD.”**

**NELSON
MANDELA**

THANK YOU

VERY MUCH

