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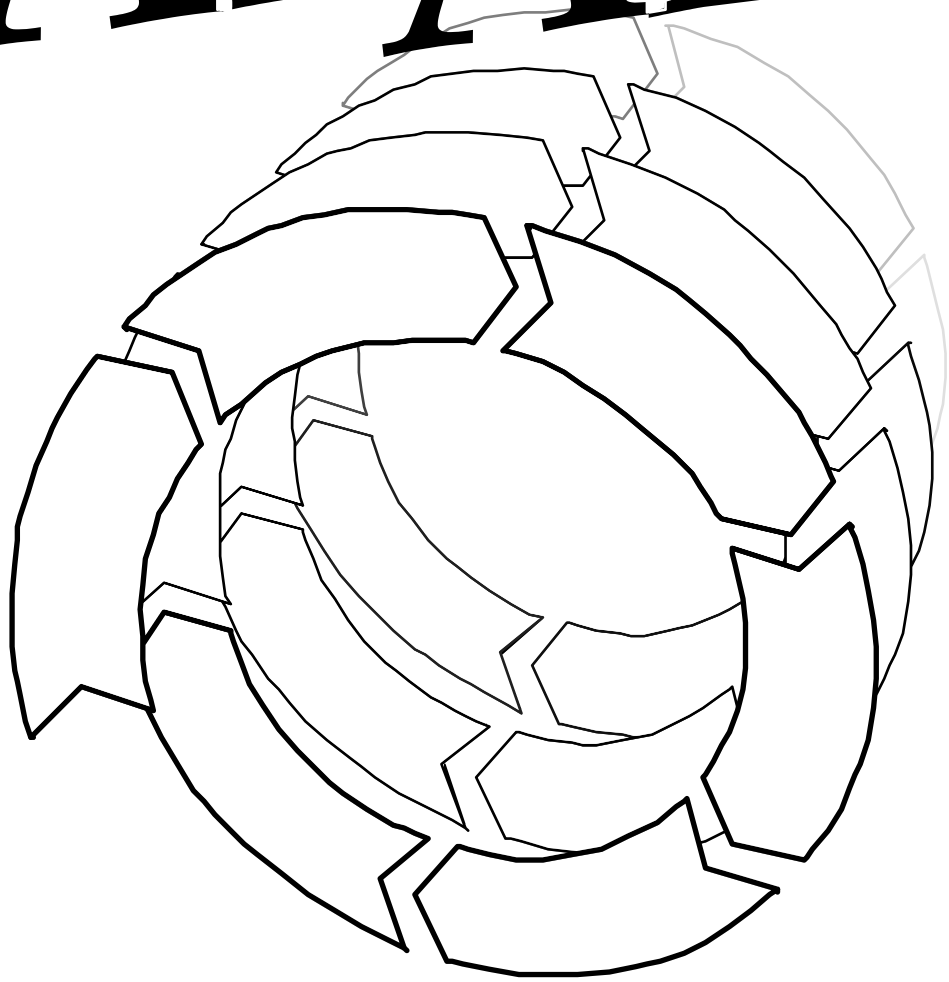

Action learning action research journal

Volume 4 No. 1 October 1999

ALARPM is a strategic network of people interested or involved in using action learning or action research to generate collaborative learning, research and action to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organisations, governments and businesses.

ALARPM's vision is that action learning and action research will be widely used and publicly shared by individuals and groups creating local and global change for the achievement of a more equitable, just, joyful, productive and sustainable society.

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CONTENTS

Editorial 2

Action learning in software development
Richard B Watson 3

As they real-ly like it! the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation)
Teresa Arnold 14

Ethics in participatory research: Ethical practice as a means of experiencing spiritual identity in the workplace
Susan Goff 36

Networking 44

People 48

Projects 49

Noticeboard 51

Guidelines for contributors 58

Publications catalogue order form 61

Information for subscribers 65

Editorial

This issue of the ALAR Journal presents three quite different articles. The articles have a common theme, however, in that they illustrate the author's own experience of action learning or participatory action research in the workplace.

Richard Watson discusses action learning in software development. He explores the role of holistic, action oriented approaches to learning that offer the potential to alleviate some of the staffing problems facing the information technology industry.

Teresa Arnold reports that people embarking on self-employment in a small, new enterprise say that learning on the run is 'As they real-ly like it'. In this article Teresa highlights the key action learning features embedded in the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation).

Susan Goff challenges us to develop our 'spiritual literacy' with her thoughtful and insightful reflections on ethical practice as a means of experiencing spiritual identity in the workplace. For Susan nothing is sacrosanct, and everything is open to critique and development through the process of inquiry.

In "Networking" we introduce the Brisbane Learning Network and encourage local people to take advantage of their regular gatherings and others to emulate their efforts.

In "People" we introduce the new ALARPM Management Committee. In "Projects" we invite you to make contact with Rory Lane in Western Australia if you want to find out what language angels speak.

In "Noticeboard" we provide an update on World Congress 5 ALARPM / 9 PAR and we give you a brief run down on some activities that are still in the planning stage for the year 2000.

Action learning in software development

– Richard B Watson

Abstract

This paper discusses some of the problems in staffing the information technology (IT) industry. It looks at a number of solutions that have been adopted and the role of action/experiential learning in helping to alleviate these problems. It reviews some recent empirical work that takes a holistic approach to on-the-job learning in the software industry and it explores some of the theories of learning that inform the process.

Introduction

Action learning, where people learn through on-the-job experience in collaboration with others, has traditionally been used in the education of managers and workers whose tasks are highly collaborative (Pedler, 1991). An important component of the IT industry is the development of computer software. This is usually carried out by teams of skilled professionals who must collaborate at a high level and, as such, it involves a degree of on-the-job learning. The process of software development, however, is still not well understood even though it is the subject of much ongoing research (see Humphrey, 1995). Theories of action/experiential learning derived from Revans (1982), Kolb (1984) and others have not been extensively applied in this field, although some pioneering research has been reported (Sacks, 1994). This paper discusses some of the problems associated with staffing the IT industry in a post-industrial economy and it suggests that action learning techniques have much to contribute. Its intention, however, is to pose questions rather than supply answers. It also presents examples of reflections by Swinburne University IT students on action learning software development projects that were supervised by the author.

Staffing problems in the IT industry

The information and telecommunications industries represent the world's fastest growing employment sector, but staffing these industries presents some serious problems. For many years the number of jobs in the IT industry has outstripped the supply of trained staff. According to the peak industry body, the Australian Information Industry Association, demand is rising annually by 8 to 12 per cent, and that demand is increasingly hard to meet. Tertiary education institutes have expanded their production of computer science and information systems graduates to try to stem the shortfall that seems to be a permanent feature of the industry. The gap though, is not the by-product of a lack of absolute numbers, but the 'churn' in demand for skills that creates a skills gap between what is available and what is needed (Head, 1998).

The IT industry is in a constant state of flux with new technologies succeeding old at a relentless pace. On the hardware side, mainframes have been replaced by ever more powerful desktops and networks have become ubiquitous. Networks range in size from local area within a single site, to the Internet spanning the globe. On the software side, new programming languages such as C++ and Java have taken over from older ones such as Fortran and Cobol. New application software has proliferated in a multitude of areas and the use of products such as Microsoft Office has become a mandatory skill for office workers. This presents serious problems for IT staff whose skills rapidly become outdated: "the programmer whose Ada skills might have been prized last year may this year be out of favour and be replaced by a Java expert” (Head, 1998).

Graduates of many IT courses are ill-prepared for working in industry (Bach, 1997). The number of topics that must be covered in a four year undergraduate program coupled with the need for extensive software project experience means that the education of new graduates has barely begun. The cost and difficulty of corporate technical training programs also places severe limitations on the ability of industry to provide formal training. As a result, on-the-job learning is the most important form of learning in the IT industry, and software development experience the most important measure of competence.

Given the above situation, staffing in the IT industry tends to be somewhat chaotic. A common strategy to obtain skilled staff is to poach them from competitors. This has resulted in inflated salaries for IT workers who have skills in high demand. Network operators, architects, Internet specialists and those with Windows NT skills can command a premium. Skills in “fashionable” software such as SAP, BAAN and PeopleSoft are also scarce (Head, 1998). The IT marketplace, like many others, is global and IT workers are frequently poached by overseas buyers. The best and brightest IT workers from all parts of the world are attracted by the high salaries and attractive working conditions offered in the United States, for example.

Many jobs in the IT industry are short-term contracts. If they are lucky, contractors can go from one contract to the next with scarcely any loss of time between jobs. The absolute number of jobs in some areas and the existence of a large IT recruitment industry to recruit staff for jobs, often by matching job skills required with those of candidates listed in their database, tends to perpetuate the movement of staff between jobs requiring similar skills. This can result in lucrative salaries for some, whereas others who lack experience or whose skills may have become out of date can find it difficult to get work. It is also arguable that in the long run motivation and efficiency of workers is best maintained by performing a variety of types of work and having the opportunity to learn new skills.

Possible solutions

The conventional solution to the skills shortage in the IT industry (as in other fields in which shortages exist) is to increase the number of IT tertiary education places offered. This is usually done by creating new courses, recruiting more teachers or, when resources are constrained as in Australia at present, increasing the workload of existing teachers. Computer-based training is also being introduced. Given the propensity of students to flock to courses in fields where there are perceived to be plenty of jobs and/or high salaries, it is assumed that the IT tertiary education places being offered will have no difficulty attracting students. Indeed an increase in supply of IT graduates has occurred in Australia and other parts of the world to the extent that the supply of IT graduates now approximately balances the demand for new graduates by the IT industry.

As mentioned above, the skills shortage is not so much a lack of absolute numbers as a by-product of the constant state of flux in the IT industry. In some areas of the IT industry there is even a surplus of staff, usually older ones whose skills have become out of date. The conventional solution to changes in demand for workplace skills is retraining of workers. The retraining of workers in the IT industry is a large industry in its own right, which is shared by tertiary education institutions and private sector providers, although who is to bear the cost of retraining is still being debated. The changing nature of the IT industry also means that some teacher skills become dated and, therefore, teachers also must undertake continuous re-education. To help IT professionals maintain their skills, formal education courses must emphasise adaptability, the ability to learn from errors and the ability to transfer domain knowledge from current to future technology (McCracken, 1997).

On-the-job learning is often touted as the most effective form of training for IT workers. Many tertiary education courses, such as those at Swinburne University's School of IT, include a period of paid on-the-job learning, or industry-based learning (IBL), as a compulsory or optional part of the syllabus. The advantage of on-the-job learning is that it is in real-time experience, it requires collaboration with real people, and offers tangible, meaningful rewards (Bach, 1997). On the other hand, it has some problems, including a lack of teaching skills by some industry mentors, a lack of control of the learning process by academics, a lack of time to pause and reflect, and a general lack of understanding of how people learn on the job. "At best, such programs bring people together in the hope that learning will take its course" (Bach, 1997).

Industry-nominated project subjects that form part of tertiary education courses in which groups of students undertake small software development projects nominated by clients from industry or not-for-profit organisations are complementary to IBL. However, IBL may not be the only form of on-the-job learning that can be fitted into intensive courses such as the Graduate Diploma in Computer Science offered by the School of IT at Swinburne University. Fillery and James (1992) describe some experiences in Information Systems education using this approach. The author has convened such a project subject for the Graduate Diploma in Computer Science students at Swinburne University for several years and examples of reflections by students on the learning gained from their projects are presented below. The advantages of both IBL and industry-nominated project subjects include a greater integration of theory and practice, and an exposure to the real world not often found in textbook problems or assignments. Industry-nominated project subjects allow greater control by academics than IBL and normally provide the motivation of producing a real product which will hopefully be used in the client organisation or sold. One of the author's project teams, for example, produced the *Kids and Diabetes* interactive educational CD-Rom for Diabetes Australia - Victoria, which is sold to all Victorian Primary Schools. Because project subjects do not normally involve working on the client's premises, they cannot provide as rich an experience of the workplace as IBL, and because the projects are smaller than many in industry, they cannot expose students to problems such as the configuration management issues associated with large projects (McCracken, 1997).

A review of some previous research on action learning in software development

Marc Sacks (1994) has reported a detailed ethnographic study of on-the-job learning in the software industry. Sacks' research provides a very detailed account of the learning processes used by programmers and systems analysts, and the use made of written materials, people, the computer and the synthesis of system knowledge. He also provides a valuable review of the theories of learning which might inform these processes. According to Sacks, most of the theories of learning which might be relevant to software development are too rooted in the traditions of laboratory-based psychology to adequately describe the rich variety of learning styles revealed by his study. Seventeen recommendations flow from Sacks' study, including the following which emphasise that learning software systems is an action learning process: corporate training should focus on programmers' jobs, not just on disembodied skills; workers should be placed such that more experienced people are accessible to serve as mentors for less experienced people; people should be given time to learn; and time for experiment and play as well as formal learning should be factored into project schedules.

The most fruitful theory of learning, according to Sacks, is David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, which views all of life as a learning opportunity, maintains that the workplace should be seen as a learning environment, and that learning itself is best defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". Kolb's model of learning is as a feedback loop with four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Sacks' study suggests that programmers' learning tasks can be matched up with Kolb's four poles roughly as follows:

- Reflective observation: watching programs run; consulting manuals; reading code; asking questions; soliciting feedback;
- Abstract conceptualisation: taking and reviewing notes; developing mental models of problems and systems;
- Active experimentation: building prototypes; running programs with different combinations of test data;
- Concrete experience: dealing with day-to-day problems on the job; relating new problems to those encountered previously; integrating conceptual and experimental knowledge into the product.

An earlier study of the process of software development (Naur, 1985) emphasised the importance of a holistic approach, and warned against the notion that programming is similar to industrial production, the programmer being regarded as a component of that production, a component that has to be controlled by rules of procedure and which can be replaced easily. According to Naur, programming should be regarded as an activity by which programmers form or achieve a certain kind of insight, a theory of the matters at hand, thus the education of programmers should emphasise the exercise of theory building. This notion appears to be consistent with Kolb's theory of learning, Naur's "theory building" equating to Kolb's "abstract conceptualisation".

Reflections by the author and students on software development projects

According to Sacks, software development projects such as those supervised by the author and others are potentially rich sources of holistic data. The software project post-mortem review is an important opportunity to learn from mistakes (Collier *et al*, 1996) and it also presents an opportunity to gather data on the process of on-the-job learning. An important part of the documentation required for the Graduate Diploma in Computer Science project subject at Swinburne University, is the Post-Implementation Review. The review is meant to present individual and collective insights gained from the project experience on the development approach used, team behaviour, risk management, monitoring and control mechanisms. These insights are a major source of the student reflections presented below. Given that the volume of material available is extensive, only short examples of comments from the Post-Implementation Reviews are included.

Development approach

A key characteristic Boehm's Spiral Model is the built in assessment of management risk at regular stages in the project. Actions are initiated to discover information that reduces uncertainty. For example, in the case of user interface risk an evolutionary prototype is used. The advantage of the Spiral Model is that there is no need to adopt a single model in each cycle of the spiral. As project development proceeded and between each stage we evaluated objectives and constraints, we suggested alternatives and estimated risks as we went. The benefits of employing prototyping as a method, inside the Boehm Spiral, lay in identifying misunderstandings with the client and clarifying functions, detecting missing Client services, and demonstrating feasibility using a working system.

Team behaviour

A group project emphasises communication skills, whereas other subjects assess programming skills. The software development project provides the experience of developing a commercial (educational) project, working as a team member, and being exposed to the entire software development lifecycle. The experience of working in the team was unforgettable.

At the beginning of the project, we decided that every member would take a turn to be manager, team leader, programmer, tester and designer. Each member liased with the client and had something valuable to contribute. We were all committed to the project. It was difficult to work together at the beginning, but we learned how to communicate with each other and the client. We developed our communication skills, such as listening, persuading, arguing, questioning and interviewing. We now have a clear understanding of the meaning of "team spirit" and this will help us in our careers.

Monitoring and control mechanisms

The project manager used the following mechanisms and techniques to control the project development process:

- *weekly and extra team meetings*
- *conversations with each team member;*
- *meetings with the supervisor;*
- *meetings with the client;*
- *software package MS Project;*
- *status reports;*
- *risk management and monitoring plan;*
- *software documentation standards.*

Risk management

The four greatest risks to the project, its impact, and its action plan are set out in the Table below.

Risk	Impact	Action
Misinterpretation of requirements.	May result in requirements not being met or product not meeting client's expectations.	Involve client at every stage. Document all requirements.
Requirements may change.	May cause extra work and scheduling problems.	Time management and scheduling will allow for adjustments.
Inexperience of team/steep learning curve.	Mistakes may affect delivery time.	Deliverables have due date for completion. Include extra time ("fudge time") to compensate.
Time constraints and pressure from other subjects.	May affect deliverables and client's expectations.	Team members will help each other in crisis situations.

Conclusions

The IT industry is very important in a post-industrial economy, however, the rapid rate of change presents enormous problems to employers, employees and educators. Formal education and training systems in IT need to be heavily supplemented by on-the-job learning and there is a need for more empirical studies of how programmers and systems analysts actually learn on the job. Action/experiential learning techniques have proved valuable in manager education and as such they may help alleviate some of the problems besetting the IT industry. Kolb's model of experiential learning is relevant to this area, but further work involving the collection and analysis of holistic data concerning on-the-job learning is needed.

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As they real-ly like it! the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation)

– Teresa Arnold

Abstract

This article discusses the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation), which is a nationally accredited, competency-based, training curriculum for people embarking on self-employment in a small, new enterprise. The action learning methodology explicitly embedded in the curriculum and other key features are highlighted. Research has shown the learning constituency's clear preferences for such a curriculum, but the mainstream response to these clear preferences has at best been limited. Also highlighted is emergent thinking regarding how the curriculum arose from the work environment in the way it did and why the mainstream response has been poor. These interpretations, either directly or via mainstream as default, inform the curriculum. The constructivist stance, of both action learning and emergent thinking, is confronting in that it encroaches on the positivist position of behaviourism and competency-based training.

Introduction

The Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) is a course specifically designed for people seeking to become self employed in a small, new enterprise. Out-sourcing and unemployment has led to many people exploring and adopting self employment. Being an employee is not the only employment option, self-employment is also seen as an option. The Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) could easily be added to, or integrated into, many other courses. The course is also well applied to people in community projects who are seeking to make their operations more strategic and/or "business like", which is the culture of enterprise promoted in the Karpin (1995) report *Enterprising Nation*. This article focuses on the context of curriculum applied to self-employment in a small, new enterprise.

First, it identifies and locates small business, the defining features of a small business, and the significance of small businesses in the Australian economy. Next, it focuses attention on learning and small business, and research indicating learning preferences of people in small business. The key features of the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) are outlined. An explanation is given as to how the curriculum came to be and suggestions are offered as to why the mainstream response is poor. Finally, the article concludes by raising issues for consideration and possibilities for the future. Possibilities include people learning "on-the-run" largely outside the training system. This future will depend, however, on whether 'As they really like it!' is real and authentic and what people in small business actually want.

Small business and its importance

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1996) has developed criteria that define *small* business. The definition is based on business size, as measured by the number of employees and type of business. A small business is a business that employs up to twenty people in services and construction sectors or up to 100 people in the manufacturing sector. The size of a *micro* business generally includes up to five people employed in the business. Agricultural business size is measured in dollar value. A small agricultural business is valued at between $22,000 and $400,000.

In the mid 1990s (OSB 1995) small, non-agricultural businesses in Australia accounted for 97% of all private business. This percentage figure represented 786,000 businesses employing 2.7 million people. This implies that there were 427,600 micro businesses employing 640,500 people. Small business is the major employer of people and businesses employing only the owner/manager/operator are a sizeable number.

Learning and small business

Learning and small business is a major focus of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), (ANTA 1996), Gibb (1997), a focus of Karpin (1995) and a concern of Field (1998 and OSB, 1997) and Gibb (1995). Gibb (1987 p. 25) states that '… such is the distinctive nature of self-employment tasks that there is no real previous employment experience which is wholly appropriate as preparation for those who have previously been in employment.' Gibb (1987) details key task and learning development needs to be undertaken at each stage in the formation of a new, small business, prior to actually starting/opening up, through to the traditional two years' survival milestone. Gibb (1995) also admits there are still significant gaps in research into how people learn in small business, particularly in appreciating learning in small business from the perspective of business people themselves.

In this article "new enterprise formation" covers a time frame which includes pre-opening feasibility testing processes, decisions regarding legal issues and negotiations regarding finances, premises, contracts and suppliers etc., through to two years after opening. The total time is indeterminate, as the period prior to opening is not fixed.

The Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) (Arnold 1994 and 1997, Arnold and Murphy 1997) was researched and developed before the publication of the federal government report *Enterprising Nation* (Karpin 1995). *Enterprising Nation* was a major project and included new research and extensive review of prior business and manager development research. Although following different research pathways, the report arrives at similar conclusions to those underlying the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation).

The priorities needed in many Australian small business courses, as identified in *Enterprising Nation* (Karpin, 1995), are germane to this article and are summarised below:

1. managing business formation (pp. 99 - 101 and 113);
2. embedding process with content in the curriculum through the use of action learning methodologies (pp. 46, 113; 189 and 213);
3. integrating disciplines or a multi-disciplinary approach (pp. 113, 189 and 192); and
4. developing personal enterprising attitudes and behaviours (pp. 44 and 187).

As its first challenge *Enterprising Nation* also details developing a positive enterprise culture (Karpin, 1995, pp. 107 - 114, 181 - 206). Essentially this is an environment in which entrepreneur education, for later use in business and management, may flourish. It is proposed that a positive enterprise culture be created and take shape through the inclusion of enterprise education (interpreted broadly across curricula) from kindergarten through to year 12 at school and post secondary education.

The report speaks of benefits to communities beyond business and industry. How this benefit is distributed and who benefits is not explained and the differing means by which people come together, organise and structure themselves is not explored. The organisation and structuring of people in the form of mutual aid enterprises and co-operatives are essential to creative forms of business, industry and self-employment. These forms of enterprise contrast with mainstream forms of business and industry in their definition of who benefits and in particular how the benefit is distributed. The report implies that benefits to the wider community invariably flow through the system via the mainstream private sector, which inadvertently assumes a gate-keeping function. In the Asia-Pacific environment, however, a more inclusive means of distributing benefits would be to place them in the community where 'community economic development' is authentic. Be that as it may, whether through the mainstream private sector or more inclusive sectors, it is likely that people will have similar learning preferences.

As they real-ly like it!

Field (1997 and 1998), Gibb (1987, 1993 and 1995), Gibb (1997 and 1998), and Kilpatrick and Crowley (1999) clearly state that people in small business prefer to learn "on the run". In varying degrees and in different combinations small business people prefer to:

- learn on the job, from and with people with whom they come in contact;
- emphasise learning, rather than training, with the
- learning being as specific as possible to each of their many different needs.

It is noted that these learning preferences do not come exclusively from people in new enterprise formation. The learning preferences are also from people in relatively established businesses and they extend back in time to include new enterprise formation.

Another point requiring clarification relates to on and off-the-job training. The national, competency-based training accreditation system calls for the learning outcomes of the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) to be classified as off-the-job (Arnold and Murphy 1997 p. 9) because the forming business does not yet have any premises for the training to be called on-the-job.

Nonetheless, given that the participants' learning outcomes are demonstrated within the real operating environment of the proposed business, the learning discussed in this article *is* considered *on* the job.

By and large, however, there are relatively low participation rates in training and development by people in small business. Gibb (1997, p. 53) suggests that the low participation rate is a 'circular argument' problem. She asks:

> ... is the problem the fact that small business does not have an established culture of training and therefore the benefits of training need to be promoted before there will be an uptake of training? Or is the problem related to the fact that training reform has focussed on large company needs and therefore must change the way it operates to meet those of small business?

She is likely correct and clearly there is a consciousness of dissonance between the supply of training by providers and the demand for training by people in small business. However it is contended that the circular argument is an unformed explanation. Australia is by no means alone in this. There is evidence from overseas that fits this dilemma (Gibb 1990 and 1993; Chaston, 1992; Good, 1995; and Lean 1998).

The Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation)

The key features of the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) may be grouped under four main headings:

- learning to manage small, new enterprise formation;
- embedding process with content;
- being enterprising; and
- real life.

The matrix below differentiates the context of the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation), see shaded window 4 in Figure 1. The title Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) clearly means what it says - the course is about new enterprises and it is designed particularly for people who are new to being in business. In contrast, the optimistically touted yet "care-less" expression "starting a new business" is ambiguous. The phrase is abstract and de-personified and the status of the person's business experience is unknown. In the minds of advertisers and readers the adjective "new" is often inadvertently switched to the "absent" person, although it is meant to describe the word business. The description "starting a new business" can be equally applied to windows 2, 3 or 4. However, people in each of these three windows clearly have different needs.

		Business Person	
		Experienced	*Novice*
Business Stage	*Existing*	1. People experienced in managing a business, managing operations of an existing business	2. People new to managing a business, managing operations of an existing business
	Forming	3. People experienced in managing a business, managing the formation of a new business	4. People new to business, learning to manage the formation of a small, new enterprise

Figure 1: Type of business person and stage of business

Gibb (1987), a leading authority on small business, provides ample evidence of how different self-employment is from being an employee. The activities he identifies which focus on the very beginning of the first business cycle are wide-ranging and rigorous. His penultimate early development stage called 'birth' (1987, p. 26) suggests the early stages are akin to gestation. This simile aptly and definitively confers uniqueness on new enterprise formation.

Embedding process with content

New enterprise formation is characterised by the uncertainty of business viability and complexity (Gibb, 1987), which are further compounded by the person needing to learn a first time. Change in its various late twentieth century forms is a further multiplier. Zuber-Skerritt (1995) points to action learning as an approach which easily and effectively accommodates environments characterised by uncertainty and complexity.

In the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) an action learning methodology is embedded in, and integrated with, small business content. Participants in the course are taken through intensive hands on business creation and development experiences in their own operating environment. Participants are challenged to define issues or problems specific to themselves and their businesses and they are supported in the exploration of possible solutions which best fit their situation and environment. Participants work with task centred processes focussing on finding solutions to issues or problems. They are encouraged to rigorously apply cycles of action learning to integrate existing knowledge with questioning insight to achieve authentic learning and to develop practical and relevant knowledge and ability.

The learning preferences of people in small business are well accommodated by an action learning methodology. Whilst it might be a tautology, there is congruence between the way it is claimed people will want to learn and the way they learn in the course. The point to be teased out of this reiteration is that: the way aspiring small business people learn in the course, fits the way researched small business people say they want to learn on the job. That is not to say, however, that action learning in the course is the same as what small business people say they do, because the action learning approach is not commonly found to be deliberately used in the small business workplace. Childs (1997 p. 32) confirms this position when she says that the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) is unique in the small business Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia.

The desire for action learning is not just a demand for efficiency or effectiveness by people in small business, nor is it simply a demand for congruence between facilitated learning and informal learning. It is suggested that there is a significant inter-relationship, perhaps even innately so, between people doing the activities, which constitute running a business and their learning on the run, hence the expressed need for such learning. Although not explicitly acknowledged, it is suggested that with action learning, this interrelation is surfaced. Both synergy and deeper satisfaction are enjoyed. It is more akin to a philosophical position of good and right, a win - win for both the participant learner and the course facilitator become possible.

Being enterprising

Action learning is particularly suited to developing and demonstrating enterprising attributes, such as a bias for action, continuous learning and an opportunity orientation (Bailey and Ciastkowski 1990, Dunn 1995 and Ball 1997). Throughout the five modules, participants identify and develop a range of personal enterprising attributes.

Equally it is suggested that action learning is an appropriate approach for the course from a facilitator's perspective, because such attributes are not readily taught. Being allied with autonomy, enterprising attributes are not something that happen to people, something that can be given, or acquired from an outside existing world, rather they need to be constructed with and by the person concerned (Candy 1989). The course participants' construction of enterprising attributes is best developed where there is an explicit partnership relationship, between facilitator and participant, as evidenced in the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation). Action learning as a strategy is well suited to this outcome. It is this relationship in particular that Childs (1997 p. 32) identifies as contributing to the curriculum being unique in the small business VET sector in Australia. Although seldom acknowledged and thus often hidden, the positivist stance of behaviourism, underlying competency-based training, denies learners the authenticity that enterprising attributes really involve.

Real life

This section includes a collection of topics concerning small business real life. In a small business there is frequently a limited number of people performing multiple roles, often across a range of disciplines, such as production, marketing and financial management. It makes sense to reflect this real life in the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation). Thus the five modules are structured to identify stages of business formation within a multi-disciplinary approach that sits easily with action learning. A diverse skill base is developed. Action learning has considerable common ground with new enterprise formation because it is a continuous improvement approach and facilitates response and adaption to on-going change.

As already mentioned, course participants apply action learning to their real idea for a small, new enterprise, within the community environment in which they will later open up and operate – real business, real places, real time. Their knowledge is local, specific and practical. Know *what*, know *who*, know *when*, know *where* are well covered and know *how* and know *why* are encouraged, with action learning's critical questioning to check what might be taken for granted or what might or might not want to be seen in the uncertain and complex environment.

The overall learning environment facilitates the development of knowledge from experience. This approach encourages and enables people to generate their own information, knowledge and ability in a supportive and challenging environment. It is more about, but not exclusively, facilitating awareness of learners' own experiences, than the awareness of the experiences and knowledge of others and experts.

Genesis of the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation)

The research, development and accreditation of Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) is part of my interest in better meeting the needs of people creating their own employment by starting a small, new enterprise. It was developed within an organisation founded on social justice and delivering "care-full" services. In my role of business facilitator, a need for a new response to learning for self employment quickly became obvious. Competency-based training as the prime means to formally recognise workplace learning, presented a hurdle for me as I had deep seated personal concerns regarding the hidden curriculum of competency-based training in the national training agenda. The challenge became finding something that was congruent with the needs of people wanting to start a small, new enterprise, met the criteria for the national accreditation system and was true to what I felt was important.

Attentive listening and responding to the evaluation of workshops in new enterprise formation provided outstanding leads. In the end, it was not that difficult. The greatest hurdle was the accreditation system. A simple approach by a teacher outlining the learning strategies used were of no concern, only learning outcomes were considered. It took considerable explanation to convince the mainstream system that the “how” of an action learning strategy in this instance, could also be the “what”. The “how” of action learning is part of the continuous improvement process cited in their own standards (RSBMCS 1996) and ultimately the key to business success. A second pass through the system achieved success.

Other contributions to the genesis of the course included a desire to test and enhance the competency-based training system. This was not intended to be a “head on” clash, rather it was working from within to see how close it could be pushed towards its limits. As a former fresh water research scientist and latter day education practitioner and researcher, only more recently have I untangled the issue of frequent dissonance between teaching approaches and epistemology. Some of my own cognitive schemas have been demolished, some have been rebuilt and others have been built for the first time.

Further contribution came unintentionally from organisational “sources”. The funding for the work relating to the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) was from a philanthropic organisation. Beyond documenting the need for the course and completing what was intended, the funding organisation had no agenda driving its development. The work was undertaken at a geographical distance from the headquarters of the funding organisation and there was little pressure to follow an agenda from these quarters either. Essentially the research and development was carried out with unusual freedom.

A lifetime, only now being recognised, of working creatively “outside the nine dots”, no doubt was an influence. Candy (1989) is careful to point out that education researchers and practitioners do not often think about the congruence between teaching method and learning practices. At the time, the congruence being sought was driven more by a quest to find improvements, than a thorough and detailed understanding of what was really happening.

Lastly and most significantly, there were contributions from people willing to share their learning experiences, needs and dreams. Feedback from, and evaluation by, participants in early workshops in new enterprise formation provided the leads and innovations to progress improvements of the workshops. The decisions made about the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) were informed by people just like those who would later participate in the accredited version of the course. The freedom enjoyed extended to being able to ask "fresh questions" as suggested by Revans (Pedler 1991). Such different questions generated answers that gave different and new information, and ultimately a new response for small, new enterprise formation.

In summarising constructivism and the study of self-direction in adult learning, Candy (1989 p. 112) states that '… the perspective which has been almost entirely neglected is that of the learner.' He notes (1989, p. 109) that 'Despite its central importance, the subject of epistemology is frequently ignored in programs of educational research. This means that people's views of what constitutes knowledge are rarely challenged, and so rarely thought through explicitly'. He also points out that some of the changes in parent disciplines of educational research, such as anthropology, sociology and psychology, are not well understood by many educational researchers.

The mainstream as default

The system and its template

Candy (1989 p. 102) claims that '… only rarely, when authors advocate a particular approach to teaching (or learning), do they make explicit their view of what constitutes valid knowledge, or how it is created, shared or reproduced'. Is competency-based training, derived from positivist behaviourism (Smith 1992), simply out of synchrony with the constructivist approach that people in small business seem to prefer?

Is behaviourism insufficient to cope with complexity and uncertainty? Briefly, competency-based training is essentially an expert driven system whereby someone somewhere provides an existing, known, correct response, that fits the prescribed learning outcome. Such dependency creates a precarious situation in a complex and uncertain environment. Learning is encapsulated in the action learning equation L = P + Q; where L is learning, P is programmed knowledge or something known already, and Q is questioning insight and fresh questions (Pedler 1991). Competency-based training makes exclusive use of P and by implication provides no place for Q. Learning and working with a dependency on P and at the expense of Q is surely unthinkable in an uncertain and complex environment requiring adaptive change that is responsive to novel and unpredictable emergent situations.

The Revised Small Business Management Competency Standards (RSBMCS) form a template for all nationally accredited small business competency-based training curricula. Small business abounds with uncertainty and complexity, which offers a part explanation as to why each business is unique (RSBMCS 1996 p. 2). The Standards also suggest (1996, p. 6 and 13) that the variability in small business causes an inability to align with the provisions of the Australian Standards Framework (AQF 1995). For example, there is an inability to “twin” different complexities in highly variable small businesses with different levels of qualifications throughout the VET and education system. Derived from the positivist perspective of behavioural sciences, VET normally lays claim to a generalisability of learning outcomes, for example, prescribed learning outcomes designed for particular competencies will similarly apply in any workplace. However, it seems that not everything about people learning in small business can be prescribed, and in some small business learning escapes the attraction of the “invisible force field” of VET.

Larger or smaller?

Field (1997) explains that people informing the development of small business courses are drawn from large business. The implication is that "one size fits all", but what impact does this have on the quality of the course and course outcomes? How suitable is a course that requires alterations and adjustments to central concepts? How appropriate is it for learners to have to "right size" the scale of business operations from large to small or micro?

Managing existing or managing forming?

As mentioned earlier, the expression "starting a new business" is often used ambiguously and, for the most part, the RSBMCS are similarly unclear. The primary purpose of the Standards are small business management 'operating in any industry sector' (RSBMCS, 1996, p. 6). The language of the text, however, is framed around existing small business and when workplaces are referred to, the number of employees are not made explicit. The RSBMCS (1996) nominate that they are to be used to design programs for 'people intending to set up their own business' (p. 13) and to advise 'intending start-up small business managers' (p. 17). Yet managing enterprise formation is at best a secondary or hidden, and at worst an accidental by product, despite their claim to the contrary. New business *formation* is not specifically mentioned and there is no text consistently referring to a new small business.

The Standards do not give new enterprise formation a level of interest commensurate with the unique business development stage. As pointed out earlier, people informing course development often come from bigger businesses, which is likely to mean that the business has been in existence for sometime. How appropriate is it to "de-construct" or reverse engineer the management of existing operations to the management of formation? The well known high levels of risk and failure and rates of entry and exit in small business are surely reasons to do more in this area, rather than default.

Where to from here?

The Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) does not claim to have got it wholly correct, but it has been created as a product that can be continuously improved. In the light of different comments it is believed that the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) is an improvement. It was researched and developed independently and it attends to the needs identified in *Enterprising Nation* through its contribution to the creation of an enterprising culture.

More importantly, the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) is informed by people representative of those who will be participants in the course, namely qualified and experienced tradespeople and teachers, counsellors, artists, engineers and scientists, shop assistants, administrators and librarians. Decisions about the course are made as close as possible to the action which flows from the decisions. The implications of this are important philosophically. An action learning approach is in marked contrast to specialists and experts making decisions about situations when their expertise is in bigger, existing businesses that are far removed from the reality of small, newly forming businesses and start up businesses. According to Candy (1989) there is much teachers can learn from learners. Collins (1991 p. 48) describes it as 'a dialectical process whereby the teacher is also a learner and the learner, in learning, teaches the teacher'.

Charles Handy suggests an "historical" point of difference that he calls subsidiarity (1994 p. 115). Although there is similarity in outcome, subsidiarity is different from empowerment in that the starting point for action is different. Handy (1994, p. 115) says subsidiarity 'is a key element in learning' and that 'change if it is to be effective depends on it'. He includes within subsidiarity the importance of keeping decisions as close to the action as possible. He interprets subsidiarity to mean that higher organisation should not claim unduly to itself work which can be performed well by a smaller and lower part. In translating the church's application of subsidiarity as a moral principle, Handy writes (1994 p. 115) 'I translate them more simply – stealing people's responsibilities is wrong'. Handy (1994 p. 115) also defines subsidiarity as the 'delegation by the parts to the centre' or reverse delegation. Although not part of this article, the point of "history" particularly important to the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise formation) is in community economic development.

It is the absence of explicit acknowledgment of competency-based training's epistemology that erodes the quality of much training on offer to small business and results in dissonance in small business, small business's failure to conform to VET, right sizing, de-construction and an absence of a sincere focus on new enterprise formation. Perhaps these weaknesses help to explain why training participation is poor. They certainly provide a starting point for further change that might better meet the needs of small business training in the future.

The mainstream system and its template RSBMCS, strongly advocate continuous improvement in small business. This article recommends that continuous improvement be derived from acknowledgment of the hidden curriculum and a deeper reading of the text in the mainstream system. It is also recommended that explicit attention be given to new enterprise formation in the template RSBMCS. Moreover, if improvements to courses are offered to business in general, not just small, new enterprises, a flow through effect may ultimately mean fewer small business failures and improved rates of start up success.

Conclusion

The challenge to the mainstream system extends beyond the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation). It is suggested that improvements coming from the fertile spot on the fringes of services to small business by the infiltration of a different epistemology, could enable people in small business to break the dependency of needing to be trained. This would be 'As they real-ly like it!'. People in small business could be equipped to learn on the run, with only occasional training for special purposes. Whilst obviously being a long way out in time, imagine the beneficial impact on the economy. This is the same ultimate outcome sought by ANTA. In fact this imagining is probably no further out in time. A particular economic dollar level and a time in the future could be tracked and reconciled. Perhaps it is not as an imaginary a point!

Insights from the Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) have been revealed and they are extendable. Imagine if the emerging lesson could be a small addition to ANTA's change? Such changes would see the inclusion of more than just competency-based training as a means of recognising learning in employment; they would also use the full potential of people learning by incorporating questioning insight. That is where the ultimate challenge lies.

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About the author

Teresa Arnold started her working life in Australia as a research scientist in inland fresh water; she also developed and operated her own small business for ten years and is now a business facilitator and educator. She is completing a Master of Education at the University of South Australia. Using a qualitative, phenomenological research methodology, the research explores learning experiences of people starting small, new enterprises, in which they become self employed. Her other work involves local economic development with the Ballarat Enterprise and Employment Fund (BEEF). BEEF is a not for profit organisation with fully integrated services in small enterprise growth including accredited training, start up finance and coaching and mentoring. The Certificate III in Business (New Enterprise Formation) was researched and developed for accreditation by her in prior employment. BEEF was a combined initiative out of the same employment. The course and BEEF were designed to go together, as necessary in different communities.

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We welcome profiles of people engaged in action learning or action research. You could submit your own or offer to write one on behalf of someone you know.

Ethics and participatory research: Ethical practice as a means of experiencing spiritual identity in the workplace

– Susan Goff

I am interested in understanding the open-ended potential of ethical practice – because it is at the open end of things that the possibility for connection with new ideas, and thus, understanding, emerges for me.

I have limited knowledge of ethics from a theoretical perspective, however, as a facilitator of action learning and participatory action research, many of the processes used are closely associated with ethical practice, as I understand it. For example:

- making research outcomes public and open to public discourse;
- reaching research outcomes through the self-determination of participants;
- making transparent the assumptions underpinning facilitation and research practice;
- modelling learning with participants;

- observing the implicit or explicit boundaries of an individual's (including the facilitator's) rights and responsibilities to facilitate change as a means of resisting cultural colonisation;
- practicing equity of participation based in the authority of experience;
- enabling the highest degree of learning, as the means by which data are developed, within the research environment.

These are some of the characteristics of participatory research. As a facilitator standing on the workshop floor realising these principles in action, I perceive aspects of the spiritual identity of those around me, and of myself, that I was not aware of in the past.

Many of us have rejected, or not been very interested to encounter, commonly accepted modes of religious experience. The reasons for our rejection may be different, but the consequence is a shared spiritual illiteracy that serves to destabilise the quality and outcomes of our labours. What is lost is another dimension of experience. In other words, our tangible world is losing the presence of human identity in spiritual terms. Along with the loss of our spiritual presence we also lose the cultural ability to know when it is not present or even that it matters. Thus, we find ourselves in a double bind of having forgotten that we have forgotten. We become awkward and vulnerable, and we privilege the "practical and material" as a means of avoiding the issue.

Participatory research is devoted to the practical in that it is action oriented, and when it is conducted in a manner that includes knowledge construction, it has the capacity to raise consciousness and make evident intangible aspects of our identity. We commonly refer to these aspects as values, principles, qualities, purpose and vision. They are not sacrosanct, but are open to critique and development as the inquiry unfolds. If we are to go beyond technical quick fixes and generate systemic, culturally based and resourced sustainable change their presence is essential.

This form of research unnerves many people as it often begins by going backward to deconstruct assumptions. It then moves forward by reconstructing propositions and relationships. These human systems do not stay locked in a clinical environment (which the facilitated workshop could be seen to be), but must encounter the socio-political pressures of the everyday world to generate robust, validated findings. Participatory research, when successfully applied, generates a quality of knowledge that is holistic and organic as well as observable and measurable. We are bound to it through our everyday hold on relationship, task and destiny. How we are bound to the experience is an ethical question and what happens when we live the experience can be a spiritual connection.

What tends to happen in work places, however, is that the invisible influences that underpin both the way we see ourselves and what we see in the world, are not included in the work process or its scrutiny. It is still acceptable for people to diminish the scrutiny of process, with the argument "I am a doer, not a thinker" or "I am more interested in the outcomes – how we get there is irrelevant". These arguments, if they can be referred to as such, fail to acknowledge that the world is made up of the consequences of how we get there as well as what we have when we arrive. As we become more aware of the inter-connectedness of all things, no person or institution is above or removed from the scrutiny of process. The issue is not whether to scrutinise process, but how to carry out such an inquiry in ways that are ethically sound and conducive to learning and to creating sustainable change for the better.

Failure to question means that implicit assumptions go on being repeated internally – for those involved, and externally – as a consequence of the outcomes of their actions. Continual restructuring, retraining and re-planning uses up precious time and money with no real benefits being achieved. Worse still, the issues that these activities seek to address go on being replicated with deepening cynicism and damage taking place. The on-going struggle between ecological sustainability and commercial viability is a good example. The old “bottom line – real world” argument fails to acknowledge that commercial viability is entirely dependent on ecological sustainability. Avoiding their integration, by constructing them as competing concepts, only increases commercial risk. So embedded is the assumption of competition that one has to be careful about using the short hand of ESD, in case the meaning “economically sustainable development” is misunderstood or overlooked.

An even more embedded and destructive assumption is that Australians are only good for primary production and cheap labour. Rather, we should be focussing on our intellectual and spiritual uniqueness and potential as key resources for the world and in doing so remove the environmental pressures we place on the land.

At the risk of sounding overly optimistic, participatory forms of research, learning and evaluation have the capacity to challenge these assumptions and generate viable, minimal risk and change for the better. It can do this by:

a) identifying embedded assumptions and rejecting the notion that they are not available for scrutiny and are not automatically accepted as “normal” or “reality”;

b) creating alternative realities which are both conceptually sound and validated in practice;

c) through careful trial and error processes, within a facilitated environment, generate energies in relationships, strategic directions and cultures that are ethical and reveal the spiritual experiences essential to sustainable, low risk change.

By recognising qualities such as humility, self-critical assessment, suspension of judgement and love of life (human and non-human), we are witnessing the emergence of the spirit in multiple settings. We search for ways to bring these values into the business of doing things in commercially viable, academically credible, socially respected and politically durable ways. Helpful ethical guidelines, which carry global traditions of human interaction, may be employed to integrate these ideas by:

- valuing life (thou shalt not kill);
- valuing ownership/custodianship of resources (thou shalt not steal);
- valuing integrity (thou shalt not bear false witness);
- valuing heritage and relationship (thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother).

These ethics can become the blueprint for developing protocols of interaction within participatory environments for research, learning and evaluation by:

- seeking to increase the quality of each person's position with regard to the issue;
- recognising the intrinsic value of each person's investment in the issue and their perceptions and stories;
- understanding that truth is individual and working towards a state of wholeness based on diversity;
- acknowledging our past experience and those that have gone before us, and choosing with respect to depart from our assumptions based on this experience.

Working within a framework that is continually referred to and recycled for development so that collaboration strengthens and a quality of identity and interaction emerges in a way that indicates spiritual sensitivity. In this moment of asphyxiating anxiety and neglect at the old end of the twentieth century, we are reaching into our soul to collectively invent a new resource as our infantile humanity gets up off its knees to realise its capacity for sustainability.

I am learning to recognise glimpses of this new resource and its manifestations as "spirituality". Joseph Campbell's (1968 p. 17) refers to them as "revelations wonder" because they speak to us of an embryonic wisdom, which we employ in our ability to perceive and express:

> "*a pantheon not of beasts or of superhuman celestials, not even of ideal human beings transfigured beyond themselves, but of actual individuals beheld by the eye that penetrates to the presences actually there.*" (Campbell, 1968 p. 34)

The presence of spirit in our work brings with it some interesting "indicators". For example:

a) the process of work, and the products from this work, are distinctive in their lack of interest in achieving **control** over others. They are more interested in ensuring that each participant is intent on their own responsibility to enable the least liability to others, and to collectively play a part in the evolving, unpredictable and inestimably creative environment;

b) expertise then, is less about determining outcomes in the interests of a dominant stakeholding, and more about facilitating awareness of individual and collective bases. This requires a profound change of culture and much patience. The sense of individual ownership and competition for a coveted place is replaced by the sense of **collective sovereignty** (profound legitimacy and identification with purpose) within the cultural setting;

c) **diversity** is not just tolerated as politically correct but understood as critical to our survival and actively encouraged to produce a mature interaction between participants and a rich resource of creativity. Diversity does not lead to prioritisation, or any other form of rational inequity, but increased inquiry and respect for the unique life experience;

d) stereotyping and generalised assumptions about truth are questioned to make room for a truth which is expressed in a unique moment in time and place, from which **patterns** and multiple translations can be made into other unique experiences in time and place. The process of pattern making (how its done, who does it and where it leads to) is the stuff of culture and becomes the hallmark of the organisation or community of interest;

e) awareness of choice and the exercise of free will is encouraged as a way of enabling individuals and groups to self-determine the steps in their life path in any setting, so that the consequences of their choice reflect back to themselves and others as the **quality of their will** (or as some might see it, their realisation of God).

These indicators are evidence of an effective participatory learning environment. May we never lose sight of the way in which our images and thoughts have critical consequences for our material existence – and how our perception of this existence is the source of nourishment for our developing perception.

> "*The shaping force of a civilisation is lived experience.*" (Campbell, 1968 p. 137)

Let there be a quest to see material existence (including man-made and other than man-made) hold within it the presence of human consciousness of evolution – not human as a controller, but human as a knowing and willing participant in the passionate hold of life:

> *"Life itself," confided Nietzsche, "confided to me this secret: 'Behold', it said, 'I am that what must always overcome itself.'"* (Campbell, p. 190)

or to put it another way:

> *"a philosophy of organic development is above all a philosophy of wholeness in which evolution reaches a degree of unity in diversity such that nature can act upon itself, rationally, defined mainly by coordinates created by nature's potential for freedom and conceptual thought."* (Bookchin, 1990)

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In our next issue of the ALAR Journal you will find …

- A generic model of action learning
- Learning outcomes of action learning: open programs and in-house programs
- Parallel action learning structures: a dynamic model
- Futures studies and anticipatory action learning – an international research project
- A progress report on World Congresses 5/9 and more …

Networking

"Networking" is a regular feature in which we bring you news about communities involved in action learning and action research. There are many such communities around the world, some of them isolated from their immediate colleagues by their different interests. In the interests of bringing them closer together, we are inviting people to describe their local action learning/action research communities to you.

The Brisbane Learning Network

What is it?

The Brisbane learning network is a collective of people from organisations, consultants and academics. It was set up as a vehicle for people interested in how learning in organisations takes place and to be able to contribute and share information. Organisations may be families, communities, businesses etc. There is a minimalist approach to structuring the Network. People in the network become interested through a number of channels. Some attended a number of conferences/workshops in 1995/6 around the theme of learning. At each of these gatherings there was a suggestion that a regular face to face set of meetings for people interested in learning to come together and share and critique experiences, case studies, tools and techniques, current research or other areas of interest with like minded others. Others have developed interest through word of mouth, mutual acquaintances, university groups etc.

Who is involved?

As mentioned above, people in the Network come from 3 main areas - Academics - often (prac) academics, organisational functional areas and consultants. The academics involved cover management, psychology, education, nursing, administration, engineering, veterinary science, agriculture among others. There are human resource, engineering, technical, management, manufacturing, welfare and other functional areas of business represented. External consultants cover the range of organisational development, business management, engineering, health professionals, communications, etc..

What is the purpose of the Network?

The basis reason for the Network's existence is as a regular forum for sharing information and learning with others for people who are in any way associated with "learning". The intention is to contribute to developing a "learning community" and connect with other like-minded groups. This is a fairly general purpose statement, but most people who are involved in the Network have a connection with improving the way they perform their roles within their respective organisations as well as developing the systems in which they are involved. This implies some sort of learning. The range of interests of Network members is huge and includes Senge's 5 disciplines, team development, action learning and research in a variety of settings, HR development issues, economic policy and development, strategic business planning and processes, personal effectiveness, etc…

When does the Network meet?

The Network has a regular gathering once per month either afternoons or mornings, either the first or second week in the month. Tuesday and Thursday afternoons have proven popular and breakfasts are usually well attended. The gatherings usually last 2 - 3 hrs. The format for the gatherings is determined by the presenter(s)/ facilitators. At the completion there is usually a short action planning session to decide themes for the next gathering. People are mailed at monthly intervals to inform them of next meeting details. Handouts for gatherings are provided by presenters. Brief refreshments are provided. The cost per session to enable maximum involvement is usually $5. When interstate and overseas presenters are available (usually when attached to pre arranged visits) a fee is negotiated.

What happens at a gathering?

Many and varied activities. The format for the gathering is usually determined by the person leading/facilitating the session. Previous gatherings have involved dialogue sessions, story telling as a metaphor for learning, experiential sessions using theatre around a theme, research presentations, round table discussions, hypotheticals, debates. Copies of handout material from previous gatherings are filed for reference. Authors ask to respect copyright procedures if materials are to be duplicated for other settings. Future developments for the network include online forums and a web page. Because of the evolutionary nature of the network, as people have energy to contribute so different developments occur.

Venues

Several venues have been used. We have rooms available at the University of Qld, Kangaroo Pt TAFE, Griffith Uni, School Halls and the AISQ. The details for each session are published with each gathering notice. If you have an inexpensive venue that would be suitable for a range of activities that accommodate between 20 and 50 people please let the convenor know.

Joining, Fees and Applications

There are no joining or application fees. If you are interested in being on the mail list for event gatherings, send your current contact details (phone, fax, address, e-mail) together with your main interest area or interest relating to "learning" to the address below. You're then on. There is no obligation to attend each gathering, however, we'd ask that you respect your commitment to attend sessions once you have replied to an invitation. If you are interested in contributing a workshop/ presentation/article etc., please let the convenor know.

Convenor

For further information and mailouts contact:

Chris Patty
CEEJAI CONSULTING Pty Ltd
113 Colburn Avenue
Victoria Point Qld 4165
Australia.

Ph/Fax: +61-7-3820 6635
Mobile: 0418 726 487
E-mail: chrispatty@bigpond.com

Upcoming Sessions

Colin Beames – Tues, 5th October, 1999, 5.00-7.00 pm

New work - A model for Organisational Development focusing on a career partnership between the organisation and employees.

Presenter TBA – Tues, 9th November, 1999, 5.00-7.00 pm

Design considerations in Learning Programs.

People

ALARPM Management Committee

The ALARPM AGM was held on 4 July 1999, in conjunction with the Brisbane Conference. Iain Govan was re-elected as President. Iain, together with the management committee, would especially like to thank Ron Passfield (Past President), Eileen Piggot-Irvine (New Zealand) and Robert Burke (NSW) who did not re-nominate. Their considerable contributions to ALARPM over many years are greatly valued. The new management committee is made up as follows:

Iain Govan	President (SA)
Anne-Marie Carroll	Vice-President - National (Qld)
Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt	Vice-President - International (Qld)
Joan Bulcock	Treasurer (Qld)
Lyn Cundy	Secretary (Qld)
Pamela Kruse	(Qld)
Susan Goff	(NSW)
Anthony Nolan	(NSW)
Di Seekers	(Vic)
Richard Watson	(Vic)

Projects

In “Projects”, we provide reports of work-in-progress or information about completed projects. There are many ways to use action learning and action research and many different disciplines and locations in which a project can be pursued. We invite people to provide reports so that we can all become aware of the wide variety of options available to us.

The WLDAS Project

- Rory Lane

A story is told about a university in the 14th century that, for all the faculties of the university, there was only one faculty with an exam. This exam had only one question.

“What Language Do Angels Speak?” ... Pass or fail on your answer.

Over the last two years, I have investigated this question in relation to thought process models such as AL/AR, organisational and leadership models, and creative thinking strategies.

Through this time I developed a book titled “The WLDAS Model: A Model Answer to a Question of Balance”. The WLDAS Model itself is essentially, an extension of an already widely used business organisational model to include a set of elements, which describe human feelings. This gave it a sense of balance and widened the applications. As well as being a useful corporate tool, it can now also be used for personal analysis or when investigating complex sociological problems.

At the ALARPM Conference in July, I introduced the WLDAS Model in a session titled "Thought Trains, Cognitive Planes and Automobilizers". In this session, 'Thought Trains' are examples of models that fit flow chart type applications, 'Cognitive Planes' are models which raise the user to higher cognitive levels and 'Automobilizers' initiate creative thinking by using key word prompts. Applications of the WLDAS Model are included in each of the types.

Since the development of this project is one of my hobbies it has allowed me to include light hearted items such as 'The Rat Race Model', 'The Principles of the Seven Dwarfs' and a series of anecdotes that are intended as thought provoking fun amidst a background of seriousness.

While I very much appreciate the rigour required in postgraduate studies, my intention in this project was to explain these concepts in a simple form. The choice of writing style became one of the ongoing challenges and one of the side benefits was an improvement in my own communication techniques.

At this stage I need feedback and advice on, if or how, to continue this project. The conference session, the book and indeed the whole WLDAS project is intended to amuse as much as enlighten.

Contact information

Rory Lane
43 Hartley Street
Coolbellup
Perth W.A. 6163
Australia

Phone: 61-8-9337 4688
Fax: 61-8-9417 5206

Noticeboard

In “Noticeboard” we bring you information about impending activities or resources, such as conferences, courses and journals. We welcome member contributions to “Noticeboard”.

World Congress 5 ALARPM / 9 PAR
University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia
10-13 September, 2000

Theme

The theme for the World Congress is: ‘Reconciliation and Renewal – Through Collaborative Learning, Research and Action’

Reconciliation refers to the process of healing dysfunctional divisions between groups of people and is not restricted to racial disharmony.

Renewal refers to the process by which groups move forward together following reconciliation.

Participants are likely to be involved in:

- creating & facilitating change
- creating reconciliation & renewal through participatory action learning & action research
- implementing processes of experiential and ‘life-long’ learning
- developing alternative learning processes and new capabilities required in the global scene of the 21st Century.

An indication of the strands to be presented at the Congress include Reconciliation & Renewal in relation to:

- inequalities in global communities
- the environment
- the experiences of indigenous peoples
- work
- religion
- the personal position in society; and
- diverse value systems.

The above strands should be read as illustrative and not exhaustive and we welcome open interpretation of the meanings behind these strands.

Audience

The congress topics will target an international audience consisting of Activists, Manager, Researchers, Academics, Consultants and Scientists from various disciplines including:

- Research and Development
- Health and Welfare
- Community Development/Action
- Environmental
- Organisational Applications
- Industrial
- Education and Training
- Rural / Agricultural
- Governmental Bodies
- Indigenous Reconciliation

Call for contributions

The Committee invites submissions to be considered for presentation at the Congress. All presentation methods will be considered including papers, workshops, posters, music, dance and others. Selected contributions will have the opportunity to be refereed and included in the Congress Proceedings.

Preparation of your submission

The submission, being a precis of your presentation, should be no more than 500 words. The submission should include:

- the title of your presentation
- names and affiliations of all authors
- name, address, telephone, facsimile and email of the proposed presenter
- all text should be typed.

Please indicate which strand area your abstract is related to and state whether your abstract is best presented as a paper presentation, a workshop presentation, a poster presentation or an alternative form of presentation.

Email or send 4 copies of your submission to:

Nadine Hutchins
The Conference Organisers Pty Ltd
PO Box 1127
Sandringham, Victoria 3191
Australia.
Email: conforg@ozemail.com.au

More than one submission may be submitted. Acceptance or otherwise is at the discretion of the Congress Committee. The presenting author will be advised in writing of the Committee's decision. All presenting authors must register for the Congress and pay the prescribed fee.

Important dates and deadlines

- deadline for contributions 1 October 1999
- authors notified 30 November 1999
- authors registration 30 June 2000
- full papers, camera ready 30 June 2000.

Congress Advocate

Professor Stephen Kemmis, Professor Emeritus of the University of Ballarat is a prominent action research theorist.

Congress Committee

The Congress Committee consists of locally based ALARPM members including: Ms Sandra Billard, Mr Ian Burness, Mr Kraig Grime, Mr Neil McAdam, Ms Di Seekers and Dr Richard Watson.

Congress Manager

Nadine Hutchins, The Conference Organisers Pty Ltd

Advisory Committee

To ensure the congress program meets the diverse needs of delegates, an Advisory Committee consisting of both Australian and international representatives has been formed, including: Prof. Ali Baquer, India, Dr Albert Barker, UK, Dr Kathleen Collins, South Africa, Prof. DP Dash, India, Prof. Orlando Fals-Borda, Colombia, Prof. Robert Flood, UK, Dr Mariana Garban, Romania, Dr John Gaventa, UK, Dr Merrick Jones, Australia, Prof. Chris Kapp, South Africa, Ms Yvonna Lincoln, USA, A/ Prof. Bob MacAdam, Australia, Dr Patricia Maguire, USA, Mr Humera Malik, Pakistan, Dr Mike Pedler, UK, Dr Timothy Pyrch, Canada, Mr Roger Ricaforte, Hong Kong, Ms Pam Swepson, Australia, Dr Yoland Wadsworth, Australia, Prof. Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Australia.

Venue

The University of Ballarat
Mt Helen Campus
Ballarat, Victoria 3350, Australia

Located less than 90 minutes from Melbourne Airport, The University of Ballarat is not only one of Australia's foremost regional universities, but through its links with the Ballarat School of Mines, it is one of the oldest. Ballarat is recognised internationally for its many varied attractions, including Sovereign Hill and the Eureka Stockade. Access the Ballarat website on www.ballarat.com to discover the many treasures of Ballarat.

Social highlights, climate and accommodation

An entertaining social program is being planned. Full details will be available in the main announcement and registration brochure.

September is Spring in Australia and the days should be sunny but cool, with the occasional shower and temperatures of around 15ºC-25ºC (60ºF-80ºF). Evenings are usually cooler.

A range of accommodation to suit all delegates' needs has been arranged. Full details will be available in the main announcement and registration brochure.

Registration

The main announcement and registration brochure, including the program, social activities, accommodation details and registration fees will be distributed in February 2000. Please complete the intent to attend form to ensure you are on the mailing list.

Congress sponsors

The Congress Committee is seeking sponsorship to assist in subsidising speaker registration fees. Expressions of interest are invited from companies and organisations to participate as a sponsor at the Congress. Enquiries regarding the various marketing opportunities available should be directed to the Congress Secretariat.

For further information please contact:

Nadine Hutchins

ALARPM/PAR World Congress Secretariat
The Conference Organisers Pty Ltd
PO BOX 1127
Sandringham, Victoria 3191
Australia.
Tel: +61 3 9521 8881
Fax: +61 3 9521 8889
Email: conforg@ozemail.com.au

Congress Website

Visit our website for regular Congress Updates at http://www.alarpm.org.au/wc5&9

We invite people to submit reports of work-in-progress or information about completed projects – so that we can all become aware of the wide variety of options available to us.

Update 2000

The Brisbane Conference is usually the venue for ALARPM's Annual General Meeting (AGM). At this year's AGM, however, it was agreed to hold next year's AGM in conjunction with World Congress 5 – Ballarat, Victoria. This will give ALARPM members from all over the world an opportunity to attend. Please put it in your diary.

The Brisbane Conference is changing its format, for the year 2000 only, so as not to clash with World Congress 5 being held in September. Rather than a two-day conference in July the organising committee is planning a day of workshops possibly in October/November 1999 and March/April 2000. They will keep you informed.

In the lead up to World Congress 5 it is likely that interested groups and networks across Australia will be holding workshops on a range of different themes in relation to *reconciliation* and *renewal* that will feed into the Congress. If you are interested in being involved in this process or if you would like to hold a workshop of your own, please let us know and we will inform the membership.

Networking Directory

The latest Networking Directory is currently in production and this year we are going to trial something new. The costs of printing the directory are becoming prohibitive and we have been looking at ways to reduce these costs. We will be asking all members on email if they would like to receive an electronic copy instead of a paper copy. This would provide an enormous saving in printing, postage and trees. If you are not on email and you would prefer an electronic copy please let us know.

Guidelines for contributors

Contributions to this journal

Through the ALAR Journal, we aim to promote the study and practice of action learning and action research and to develop personal networking on a global basis.

We welcome contributions in the form of:

- articles (up to 10 A4 pages, double spaced)
- letters to the editor
- profiles of people (including yourself) engaged in action research or action learning
- project descriptions, including work in progress (maximum 1000 words)
- information about a local action research/action learning network
- items of interest (including conferences, seminars and new publications)
- book reviews
- report on a study or research trip
- comments on previous contributions

You are invited to base your writing style and approach on the material in this copy of the journal, and to keep all contributions brief. The journal is not a refereed publication, though submissions are subject to editorial review.

Contributed case study monographs

Contributions are welcomed to the Action Research Case Study (ARCS) monograph series. The case studies in this refereed series contribute to a theoretical and practical understanding of action research and action learning in applied settings. Typical length is in the range 8,000 to 12,000 words: about 40 typed A4 pages, double spaced.

Types of case studies include (but are not limited to):

- completed cases, successful and unsuccessful
- partial successes and failures
- work in progress
- within a single monograph, multiple case studies which illustrate important issues
- problematic issues in current cases

We are keen to develop a review and refereeing process which maintains quality. At the same time we wish to avoid the adversarial relationship that often occurs between intending contributors and referees. Our plan is for a series where contributors, editors, and referees enter into a collaborative process of mutual education.

We strongly encourage dual or multiple authorship. This may involve a combination of experienced and inexperienced practitioners, theoreticians, clients, and authors from different sectors or disciplines. Joint authors who disagree about some theoretical or practical point are urged to disclose their differences in their report. We would be pleased to see informed debate within a report.

You may have interesting case material but may be uncertain of its theoretical underpinnings. If so, approach us. We may offer joint authorship with an experienced collaborator to assist with the reflective phase of the report.

Another option is to submit a project report initially for the ALAR Journal (1000 words) with a view to developing the report into a full case study.

Detailed guidelines for case studies are available from the editor, ALAR Journal. The first case study in the series, by Vikki Uhlmann, is about the use of action research to develop a community consultation protocol.

The cost of *Consulting on a consultation protocol* is listed in the following Catalogue order form.

I would like to receive more information about the ALARPM Association and its activities

Name:	Please send me more information about:
Address:	
	❑ membership of the Association
	❑ other publications related to action learning and action research
Telephone:	❑ the next World Congress on action learning and action research
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	Economy	$8.50	$13.50	$23.50	
Zone 1, 2 & 3	Airmail	$11.00	$18.50	$33.50	$7.00
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Zone 5	Airmail	$14.50	$25.50	$47.50	$9.00
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Information for subscribers

ALARPM membership subscription

The ALAR Journal can be obtained by joining the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) Association. Your membership subscription entitles you to copies of the ALAR Journal and a reduced price for Action Research Case Studies.

ALARPM membership also provides you with discounts on other publications (refer to attached Catalogue order form) special interest email networks , discounts on conference/seminar registrations, and a membership directory. The directory gives details of members in over twenty countries with information about interests and projects as well as contact details. The ALARPM membership application form is enclosed.

ALAR Journal subscription

A subscription to the ALAR Journal alone, without membership entitlements, is available to individuals at a reduced rate. Subscription rates for institutions and libraries are also invited. The ALAR Journal subscription form follows the ALARPM membership application.

Overseas subscriptions for ALARPM membership or the ALAR Journal can be paid by credit card (as indicated); payments by cheque, money order or bank draft should be in Australian dollars drawn on an Australian bank.

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* My interests relating to action learning, action research, process management are:

____

* My projects relating to action learning, action research, process management are:

____

Do you wish to be linked with a world network of people with similar interest? Yes/No

- ❑ Action Learning
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- ❑ Organisational Change & Development
- ❑ Process Management
- ❑ Quality Management
- ❑ Rural Community Development
- ❑ Social Justice
- ❑ Systems Methodologies
- ❑ Teacher Development
- ❑ Teacher Development - Higher Education
- ❑ Team Learning & Development
- ❑ Vocational Education
- ❑ Workplace Reform
- ❑ Other ____________________

* This information will be included in our database and will appear in the annual network directory.

Please complete payment details overleaf ☞

To apply for ALARPM membership, which includes ALAR Journal subscription, please complete the information requested overleaf and the payment details below. You do not need to complete the ALAR Journal subscription form.

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Mailing address within Australia

❑ $85 AUD Full membership for people with mailing address ***within*** Australia

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