

ALAR

Action learning and action research journal



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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, peaceful and sustainable society.

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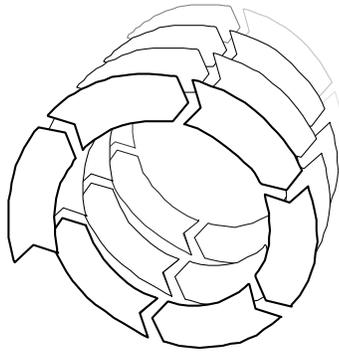
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Editorial

The ALAR ensemble of practitioners, academics and students produces affirming research sounds. The harmony created by the authors' different approaches echoes the drive of empowerment embedded in ALAR.

From one of the doyens of ALARPM, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, comes the rich, deep beats of percussion. Her answers to Mary Farquhar's questions provide a meaningful counterpoint. Recognizing the beat gives one a sense of the deep roots of ALARPM as an organization.

Lyndell Turton contributes to the harmony by means of an inspiring community-based project. What she adds, represents numerous sounds in one.

An African perspective, provided by Ed Cumings, brings the indigenous sounds of the penny whistle – a reminder that ALAR can empower people to address their own challenges. Currently in South Africa this challenge is skills development.

Coming from the base strings of Geof Hill, storytelling as means of inquiry is the creative touch to the ensemble work. With a nurtured musical intelligence (ALAR intelligence) one is convinced of the difference between this ensemble work and stereotyped traditional research.

Lindy McKeown is a young ALAR performer. With her focus on the professional development of teachers she brings hope for the future of ALAR ensemble work. If she exemplifies the potential of young scholars, there is no doubt that the ALAR future is bright.

Let us create opportunities for scholarly development, such as the graduate certificate program offered at the Swinburne University and the forthcoming ALARPM World Congress in Groningen, Netherlands, in August as reported in the "noticeboard" section.

Enjoy ALAR ensemble 10 (2)!

Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM): A personal history

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt & Mary
Farquhar-

Abstract

This paper is an edited version of an interview that presents information and insight into the background of ALARPM (Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management) not only as a field but also as a worldwide network association, thus facilitating understanding of the evolution and nature of these three concepts. The interviewee's responses reflect her personal perspective, informed by both life experience and a theoretical framework that conceives of ALARPM first as a philosophy, a theory of learning and a methodology, and second as a method and technique.

Introduction

Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management have developed independently, and conjointly through ALARPM, to make valuable contributions to learning and research. Yet this history is little known. Here we take an action research approach to uncover some of this history. We have adopted an interview format to reveal some of the personal dimensions involved in the origin and history of ALARPM, making fresh insights accessible to a wider readership.

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (OZS) is a founding member of ALARPM: Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management. Mary Farquhar (MF) who initiated with Ortrun the First International Symposium on Action Research in Higher Education, Industry and Government in Brisbane in 1989, and who has collaborated with her on many projects, conducted this interview with Ortrun in Brisbane late in 2000. The interview was inspired by a conversation between Ortrun and Mary that highlighted the utility of this type of oral history for recording the development of ALARPM, about which almost nothing had been recorded to that time. We present here an edited version.

This interview focuses on three areas in which Ortrun has been involved personally and that are useful to understanding how ALARPM has been developed in the past two decades in particular: (1) Ortrun's personal understanding of Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management in relation to her own professional development; (2) her role in institutionalising ALARPM as a legitimate and highly useful research and development approach; and (3) her views on work required to develop the field further. Accordingly the paper is structured under three headings: personal understanding and development; institutionalisation; and the state of the field.

Personal Understanding and Development

MF *Let's treat this interview as a personal reflective piece on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management or in short, ALARPM. What do you think ALARPM is? Academically, is it a field, a discipline, a method, or a state of mind?*

OZS *I don't like to think only academically when it comes to the notion of Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management, because I consider these concepts as an*

integrated framework. If pushed, I say it is now an academic field, not a discipline, but it is a multi- or interdisciplinary field. Yes, it is also a method for learning and development, i.e. personal, professional and organisational development and transformation. Is it a state of mind? Yes, and more than that, I believe. It affects the whole person largely through one's perspective of self: mind, soul, spirituality, ethics, values and worldviews, and hence actual behaviour.

MF *How did you become interested in ALARPM?*

OZS *I became interested when I was working in a university with colleagues, most of whom believed in a paradigm of learning and research that differed from mine. These people were positivists in research and didacticists in higher education. My ideas and approach to learning, teaching and staff development were totally out of keel in this environment. My work was constantly attacked or ridiculed; I felt vulnerable and hurt most of the time.*

For me this was a new and profoundly powerful Socratic experience since I knew intuitively that my philosophy had merit. I was alone, but deep inside I could not accept that majority views must be right, accepted or adhered to simply because of their majority status. I recognised that we should not leave a paradigm unchallenged simply because it is dominant. So I searched for like-minded colleagues and support, and I found them in what was then the School of Modern Asian Studies at Griffith University where I was working in academic staff development at the time. You were one of these colleagues, Mary, and others included Professor Colin Mackerras, then Dean of the School; Nick Knight, now Professor and Head of the School (now called Asian and International Studies); Bob Elson, now Professor and Director of the Griffith Asia Pacific Council; and Alan Rix, now Professor and Executive Dean of Arts at the University of Queensland.

MF *Who provided key influences on the early development of your thinking about ALARPM?*

OZS *Apart from colleagues I've just mentioned at Griffith University during the 1970s and 1980s, I was most influenced in the 1970s by scholars I met at conferences or whose work I had read, such as Fred Emery, Alan Davies, and Alistair Crombie at the Australian National University in Canberra. I was interested in their adult and workplace learning theories. In the 1980s I was influenced by people working in the Deakin School of Education, such as Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, Rob Walker, Colin Henry and John Smyth. I was impressed and challenged by their critical action research in education and teacher development. These people and their thinking were the catalysts for the development of my work from then on.*

MF *What about action learning?*

OZS *Around the mid-1980s after I'd conducted many collaborative action research projects in higher education in Australia, people in the audiences during my tour of invited lectures in Sweden repeatedly mentioned Reg Revans. They said that I was thinking and arguing like him, but I'd neither met nor even heard of him. So in libraries in Stockholm and Gothenburg I found books and references in Swedish, Norwegian and German. Back in Australia, I managed to find some of his books in English, but most were out of print. It was satisfying for me to read about action learning because it confirmed the learning and teaching principles and strategies that I'd upheld despite derision from many of my colleagues.*

MF *And how did you find Revans's ideas?*

OZS *I was impressed by his writings and we've had written communication ever since (his on the typewriter or handwritten!). I visited him in his home in Manchester in 1986 and he gave me many of his books, including those out*

of print. In 1989 I was very surprised to find that Reg Revans's philosophy had substantially influenced the work of the International Management Centres Association (IMCA), a professional society founded in 1964 with headquarters in Buckingham, UK. IMCA is the world's first multinational business school that has been dedicated to action learning since 1982. The reason why IMCA and I were impressed with Reg Revans's ideas was because we agreed with his philosophy which he skilfully expressed in very simple terms: $L=P+Q$. He maintained that programmed knowledge (P) is useful for our learning from experts (teachers or professors in lectures or books), but it is not sufficient. We also have to learn from asking ourselves fresh questions or from 'questioning insight' (Q). At school and university we mainly learn from P, but there are also many intelligent people who leave school early and become very successful in their careers as senior managers or CEOs, because they are good at learning from their experience. These people have welcomed Reg Revans's ideas of action learning and the IMCA's strategy of facilitating action learning programs leading to higher degrees, including Masters and Doctoral dissertations.

MF *How does action learning relate to action research?*

OZS *After my introduction to Revans's work in the mid-1980s, over time I thought extensively about action learning, particularly in relation to my own approach with action research. In the late 1980s I came to recognise that the philosophy underpinning action learning was really very similar to that of action research. So I set out to learn more about how it had developed. I discovered that action learning had its origins in England with Reg Revans in the 1930s and 1940s. Reg was then a Professor of Management Studies at the University of Manchester, working with managers in coalmines who learnt with and from each other to improve working conditions and productivity. He summarised this work at the First World Congress on ALARPM in 1990, in his keynote address that I published*

as a book chapter and recorded in a video interview (Revans 1991a and 1991b).

*How is action learning different from action research?
Action research includes action learning and more. Action research is more systematic, strategic and rigorous. It can sustain extensive scrutiny and it's always made public through presentations and publications. The difference here is basically the same as the difference between learning and research generally – both are about acquiring knowledge but research pursues a more diligent, investigative inquiry and its purpose is also to create knowledge.*

MF ***You've told us about the origins of action learning in England. What are the origins of action research?***

OZS *The inspirations that gave birth to action research are very similar to those that compelled Reg Revans towards action learning in the UK. Action research originated in the 1940s with Kurt Lewin's philosophy and methodology of finding ways to change or improve human and social conditions. He took his influence to the US after he emigrated from Berlin as a Jew during the war. I think that Lewin's concepts are best summarised in the Action Research Planner by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).*

MF ***Could you please summarise them for us here?***

OZS *Yes. I think the most effective way is through five overheads that I prepared precisely for this purpose in my teaching. These summarise concepts of action research, the 'thematic concern', action research steps, moments in action research and the types of outcomes from action research (see Appendix 1).*

MF ***So, have the traditions of action learning and action research developed separately in England and America?***

OZS *Yes. As with many great ideas and innovations, action learning and action research developed in parallel, from about the same time in the 1940s and inspired by similar social and economic concerns. Both were born in Western contexts, and derive from western industrial and social experience. And both have had to struggle against entrenched Western intellectual traditions. But they were developed quite independently of each other in different countries, on different continents. Both were forgotten or at least set aside during and immediately after World War II but both were revitalised from the late 1960s, again independently, after about two decades of post-war recovery. Nevertheless people in the two camps had little communication with each other until 1990 with the first ALARPM World Congress that brought the separate strands together.*

It's interesting now to see how Revans and Lewin developed their ideas independently in response to the social and economic problems of their time. I think that we still confront social and economic problems, but now the scale of these problems is global and the problems have become more homogenised. With this, more and more of us have ready access to almost instant communication with people near and far, so that people globally now share problems that in earlier times were more localised.

MF *What about process management?*

OZS *Let's leave that till later in this interview when we turn to institutionalisation. I'll then talk about process management and how it relates to action learning and action research.*

MF *What did you find most difficult about ALARPM when you started work in this area?*

OZS *Ironically, what I needed to cope with what I found most difficult in my workplace was precisely what I found most*

difficult about ALARPM. It was identifying, understanding, and then putting into practice the philosophy of ALARPM. I was forced to do this because in academia in the 1970s and early 1980s I was constantly having to justify the validity, usefulness and work relevance of my approach – action research – in theory and practice. I had no mentor and I didn't understand clearly the philosophical assumptions underlying the different paradigms that influence people's actions and reactions, and how and why they approach learning and research tasks. These philosophical shortcomings limited my ability to argue my case cogently and ultimately blocked my career development for almost a decade.

So, from personal experience I consider it very important for academic staff and students to learn about and understand the deepest levels of inquiry: epistemology. I think this is especially so for postgraduates who usually have limited experience exploring epistemological issues and need what epistemological inquiry cultivates: the ability to argue persuasively. Postgraduates have to convince their examiners that their action research is valid and rigorous within the phenomenological paradigm.

MF *Can you explain your last point in more detail?*

OZS *Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and origin of knowledge. Epistemology asks questions that can force us to probe deeply into our consciousness and examine assumptions that are usually unrecognised, with questions like: What constitutes knowledge? How do we come to know? How do we learn? How is knowledge produced?*

As Richard Bawden and I point out in our joint paper to be published in the next issue of this journal, there are at least three kinds of knowledge: propositional or theoretical knowledge which is traditionally taught in schools and universities; practical knowledge taught mostly in

institutions of technical and further education or polytechnics; and existential knowledge which is the realm of action learning. Similarly, there are at least three kinds of learning: theoretical learning (learning what); practical learning (learning how to); and existential, experiential learning (learning why). These kinds of knowledge and learning fundamentally shape our knowing, doing and being respectively.

MF *So what are the implications of epistemology for learning and teaching practice?*

OZS *I acknowledge that there are many academics in universities around the world whose teaching philosophy and practice are informed by theories of adult learning that encourage a learner-centred, problem-oriented approach. However from my observations of higher education institutions in many countries, conventional teaching philosophies and practices still predominate.*

Conventionally, it is assumed that experts convey their knowledge to novices who acquire and accumulate that knowledge. You might have seen the caricature of the professor pouring a jug of information into the empty vessel, i.e. the student's head. In this view learning is perceived as a one-way operation of information transmission: input, process and output. Input is determined and prescribed arbitrarily by experts; output is usually measured in examinations; and the most successful method of passing exams is rote learning, no matter whether it leads to understanding (and retention beyond the exams) or not.

However, in action learning we recognise that people, especially adults, do not start with a tabula rasa – a blank mind. They have already acquired knowledge, skills, opinions and values through life experience, upbringing, and religious, socio-historical and cultural influences, through reflection on their trials and errors as well as their

achievements, and thus through their personal constructs of phenomena that they're very familiar with. We try to explore these existing constructs and capabilities – the self as learner/researcher – first, and then build on them by asking probing and guiding questions (the answers must be found by the learners themselves) and linking the learners' new knowledge to their existing knowledge.

MF *And what are the implications of epistemology for research?*

OZS *Similarly, in human and social research it's traditionally assumed that only experts are capable of formulating a scientific hypothesis. They test this hypothesis by selecting and using certain variables, research methods, a convincingly large sample of 'subjects' and control groups, and finally confirm or refute the hypothesis to produce knowledge. So, in this approach the researcher is perceived as an expert – an 'outside' 'objective' observer who studies his/her 'subjects' in controlled yet empirically valid situations, using 'scientific' methods and achieving 'objective', genuine and reliable results that can be generalised into objective knowledge or 'fact'.*

Action research proceeds from quite different epistemological premises. These recognise that knowledge is not created through systematically testing hypotheses but rather it is a product of learning about learning: what it is and how to do it. In action research it is assumed that all people who seek to learn and are not mentally disabled are potentially 'personal scientists'. They are capable of creating knowledge on the basis of concrete experience by reflecting on this experience and formulating concepts and generalisations, then testing these concepts in new situations that provide new concrete experience and a new cycle of generating experiential knowledge. This is represented in Kolb's well-known experiential learning cycle.

MF *How have action learning, action research and process management influenced your career?*

OZS *Once I recognised that epistemology was not only useful but in fact essential for my work in university staff development, I furthered my study of the philosophy of science. I was influenced by certain paradigms and new traditions, such as the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, the Deakin School of Educational Action Research, Action Science by Chris Argyris and his associates in the US, and Action Theory by Vygotsky Leontjev and his associates in Russia and Germany, as well as by Personal Construct Theory by George Kelly and his followers in the UK. This knowledge gave me the insights I needed for effective intellectual argument. I felt much more confident in my practice of university staff development, in my conference and seminar presentations, and in my writing. So I started publishing my work. When my papers were accepted for publication in internationally refereed journals and my books were accepted by reputable publishers such as Pergamon Press, Kogan Page and Gower in the UK, I was finally promoted from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer. I successfully applied for the position of Associate Professor in charge of staff development and organisational development at the University of Queensland, and after two years, I was invited by Southern Cross University to take up the position of Professor and Director of Research and Postgraduate Studies in the Faculty of Education, Work and Training.*

So action research was instrumental for me in developing my career, in two ways really. It enabled me to respond convincingly to peer pressure that I prove my point, work harder, and argue more convincingly. And since it was predominantly through my publications that I was eventually accepted in academia, and promoted, I acknowledge what I've gained from action research in compelling me to publish my work. My PhD thesis in the mid-1980s is said to be the first thesis about action research

in theory and practice in higher education. I'm told that my thesis laid the ground internationally for action research to be accepted as academic research and for many postgraduates across the world since then to follow my example by using action research for their own theses.

MF *Do you think this has helped others?*

OZS *Yes, I do. I'm always very pleased when I hear from people in many parts of the world who acknowledge the usefulness of my work in their own learning, teaching, research and development. And I recognise that the educators whom I've trained in action research can have a multiplier effect through the students whom they train. I feel this is reward for my own hard work against traditional scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s. It's also proof to me that at times it can be not just legitimate, but in fact obligatory ethically, to challenge the dominant paradigm when our own judgement directs us to do this.*

Institutionalisation

MF *Ortrun, you and I conceptualised the first International Symposium on Action Research over discussion one night in January 1988. How did this Symposium lead to the First World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management?*

OZS *At the end of the Action Research Symposium, everyone present agreed that this event should be repeated on a larger scale, incorporating the other two related traditions, action learning and process management. I remember driving home from the venue with my colleagues who were at that time from Surrey University in the UK, Maureen Pope and Pam Denicolo. We were totally exhausted and Maureen wondered: 'Why do we do this to ourselves? We could have had a holiday instead!'. The question continues to resonate with me; I know why I did it then and still do it now. It's*

because I believe that ALARPM is making valuable contributions to the way more and more of us understand learning and research. I see that it contributes to education and other learning situations through encouraging active, self-reflective processes. This belief has fuelled my desire to secure for ALARPM the institutional legitimacy and academic recognition that I believe it truly deserves. So I convened the First World Congress on ALARPM the following year, drawing on like-minded colleagues and their connections in industry, government and higher education.

MF *What were the major difficulties with organising the First World Congress on ALARPM at Griffith University in Brisbane?*

OZS *The biggest was funding; we had none.*

MF *So, how did you do it?*

OZS *We – the Organising Committee – became a true action learning group, using action learning to advance its own cause. We were ‘comrades in adversity’, as Reg Revans would say. We discussed our funding and other problems and solved them in highly creative, collaborative ways. For example, we divided our outgoing mail into equal batches for dispatch through our respective organisations. It was not the most efficient process, but since we had no conference funding, this was our only way. Ron Passfield, our treasurer, invented a brilliant system for bronze, silver and gold sponsorships. It was successful, and we were able to employ UNIQUEST, the University of Queensland’s conference organising body, as organiser for our Congress. We needed 110 delegates to break even; we actually had 360 who attended!*

MF *How and when did action learning, action research and process management become ALARPM?*

OZS *It happened over time, between 1989 and 1992. As I mentioned earlier, I was involved in action research for many years before I discovered action learning, which confirmed my previous theories and practice. I was involved in a special interest group called the Process Management Group (PMG) that met at least once a month at the Queensland Institute of Technology (now a university: QUT) and Griffith University. We discussed innovative methods of managing and facilitating processes of learning and development. This is process management. The participants in these PMG workshops were professionals from many sectors. We were all interested in learning from and with each other, discussing why and how to facilitate learning (rather than 'teaching' and 'training'), and sharing the problems and difficulties in our actual practice. I offer more on process management in the article I've co-authored with Richard Bawden in this journal issue.*

MF *Does the Process Management Group still meet?*

OZS *No, it no longer exists. It has been subsumed by the wider action learning and action research community that shares its aims and concerns. In the First World Congress in 1990 we brought together for the first time: (1) the three separately developed traditions of action learning, action research and process management; and (2) professionals from various sectors engaged in professional and organisational or community development through processes of ALARPM. Most of these people were working in education, higher education, technical and further education, government research departments, training and development agencies, human resource management and consulting firms. Others were small- and medium-sized business owners and consultants in large corporations.*

MF *When was the ALARPM Association established?*

OZS *At the Second World Congress in 1992, also in Brisbane, but this time at the University of Queensland. Ron*

Passfield was the first elected President of the Association and remained in this position for seven years until 1999 when Iain Goven was elected to replace him. Now in 2000 Yoland Wadsworth is the president, and ALARPM has meantime become a worldwide movement. For example, at the Fourth World Congress in Cartagena (Colombia) in 1997 there were over 1,800 delegates from 61 countries. At this event we combined ALARPM with the PAR (Participative Action Research) Eighth National Conference in the Americas. The Fifth ALARPM Congress was held in Ballarat, Victoria, in September 2000; the next ALARPM World Congress will be convened by Dr Pieter Du Toit at the University of Pretoria (South Africa) in October 2003.

MF *Even with this worldwide organisation, do you think ALARPM is accepted in mainstream management circles?*

OZS *When you say 'mainstream management circles', do you mean (1) management in the private sector or (2) private business schools or (3) graduate schools (or colleges) of management in universities?*

MF *All of those.*

OZS *Let me comment on each group in turn, since these responses are mixed. First, management circles in business and industry. In general and in my experience, they have long recognised and confirmed that processes of ALARPM are not only appropriate, but are also a very effective method for long-term professional development and are a means for responding rapidly to organisational challenges that require fast action, change or transformation. So that's the first circle, the private, commercial sector.*

The second circle, private business schools, is generally more responsive to business and industry needs than university departments because these schools rely on full-

fee paying students. Private business schools have been more open than universities to new methodologies such as ALARPM since they have the imperative to give their clients maximum benefit and satisfaction from the client's investment in constructive workplace management. A good example is the International Management Centres Association (IMCA) that I mentioned earlier. It's a private business school and a professional membership organisation dedicated to improving personal and organisational performance via action learning. My colleague, Faith Howell, and I conducted research into the effectiveness of MBA and Doctoral programs in the Pacific region and the relevance of these programs to industry over a five-year period (Zuber-Skerritt & Howell 1993), and we found that both the individual associates who had participated in these IMCA programs and their sponsors (i.e. the CEO or top management in their organisations) appreciated the IMCA philosophy and processes of action learning. They were enthusiastic about the learning outcomes for themselves and for their organisations. But they also would have liked these degrees accredited by universities or state bodies.

However, many teaching academics in graduate schools of management in universities, the third circle, are still reluctant to accept process oriented approaches to learning and research. They insist on covering a certain curriculum content and on teaching the theory of the field. Being university academics in a relatively new field – management – they feel they are under pressure to demonstrate that they're as 'scientific' and grounded in theory – as 'academic' – as their colleagues in other disciplines. So they're in a difficult situation. They experience the old battle between the two competing paradigms in the social sciences. Some of them remain secure in the traditional positivist paradigm of knowledge transfer from expert to novice; others venture into the new paradigm of creating 'grounded theory' based on data and reflection on experience. I discuss this further with Chad Perry in our joint paper in the next issue.

MF *So, how do you see ALARPM surviving and being accepted in private business schools and maybe even more widely in universities?*

OZS *I think this legitimisation is already under way. Primarily it's because of the strengths of ALARPM that are evident at this time in our history. But it's also hastened by the hand of the market. As public funding for higher education diminishes, even the most conservative educational institutions will come to realise that their traditional philosophy of learning is outdated (at least in the social and human sciences) and requires revision or perhaps complete overhaul premised on quite different assumptions about knowledge and learning.*

Traditional learning philosophies are largely irrelevant to the needs of industry and society in the 21st century, so they don't appeal to full-fee or part-fee paying learners who demand value for both the money and time they invest in their study. This 'investment' rationale is particularly strong among mature-age, part-time students whose numbers are likely to increase when full fees are introduced. So we can expect to see a shift from lecturer- and content-oriented teaching to process-oriented facilitation of learning, as the competition intensifies among education providers – universities and private schools and colleges – to attract these students' business. This type of learning is more relevant to the needs of both the learner and the organisation he/she is working in and ideally sponsored by. The pedagogical shift is justified theoretically and confirmed in the adult-learning literature. Incidentally, Knowles (1985) coined the term 'andragogy' for the science of adult learning as opposed to pedagogy, the science of child learning. It's a pity he made the mistake of using the prefix andro (Greek for male, man) instead of anthro (Greek prefix for human, people). Anthropogogy would truly reflect the people-centred nature of this new field of

study, rather than indicating that it's for men only! But why not simply refer to the field of 'adult learning'?

MF *What will happen if universities resist this shift?*

OZS *If universities don't change their management education and adapt to the needs of business and industry, university reputation will suffer and student numbers will decline. This is very likely to induce a situation where university accreditation will no longer be warranted. Clients will prefer private business education by private providers. Again IMCA is an example. In England it is an accredited institution of the British Accreditation Council (BAC) for Independent Further and Higher Education, which gives IMCA the endorsement of the British Council. In the US, IMCA's newly established University of Action Learning (UAL) with its headquarters in Boulder, Colorado, is listed and approved by the State of Colorado Commission on Higher Education. The UAL is also accredited independently by the Washington-based Distance Education Training Council (DETC), which is recognised by the US Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as a national accrediting agency.*

So, in this field university accreditation might soon be irrelevant, redundant or even undesirable, depending on how graduate schools of management develop in the future. There are encouraging signs from some progressive university schools and colleges that have already introduced action learning programs and action research projects in their curriculum – for example, the University of South Australia and the Southern Cross University in Australia. To come back to your question about university resistance to ALARPM, I think it's no longer a question of whether ALARPM is accepted by mainstream management circles. It's now a question of whether ALARPM customers accept the paradigm, strategies and methods of mainstream management circles. We see here the classic economics of

supply and demand since it's these customers – learners and often their corporations – who create the market demand that will sway the supply of educational service; i.e. pull it towards ALARPM. The learning tide has already turned. This was confirmed by the Karpin Report (1995) that criticised traditional management education in Australia and recommended, among other things, action learning programs as one of the main strategies for renewing Australia's management and leadership skills 'to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century' and its global competitive advantage.

MF *And that's what we're doing in the Australia-South Africa Links Project: 'Leadership Development for South African Women Academics through Action Learning and Action Research'.*

OZS *Yes, that's an excellent example. And another one is our joint project with Chinese language teachers at Griffith University for which you and I received a grant from the NPRF (National Priority Reserve Fund) in 1993. These programs seek to introduce and develop acceptance of the paradigm, strategies and methods of ALARPM within institutions of higher education.*

The State of the Field

MF *The field of ALARPM is criticised as theoretically thin. What do you think?*

OZS *I think this assessment is indicative of the continuous struggle that ALARPM undergoes in the academic domain, where many assess ALARPM through a lens shaped by quite different pedagogical premises – usually tendentiously. We also need to recognise relativity here. Action learning, action research and process management is a new field within the social sciences, which as a broader categorisation is itself relatively new when compared with traditional sciences like the natural sciences. So in this*

sense it's not surprising that by comparison with these older fields ALARPM is not as established, institutionalised and theoretically rich. Yet it's not as theoretically 'thin' as some critics portray. It already has a strong theoretical basis that is continually being developed. By its very nature ALARPM advocates reflective learning on past experience to inform further action. It therefore cannot be one grand theory, as conventional theory may expect. It must comprise a complex network of related and inter-related theories that contribute to and strengthen the field. The main philosophical pillars of this theoretical framework include action science, personal construct theory, systems theory and critical theory, as well as theories of EQ (Emotional Intelligence versus IQ) and of values/worldviews.

In action research, for example, these theories may inform the action researcher, but more importantly – and this is a critical difference between action research and traditional research – action research generates theory not only about practice, but through practice. This is why action research has become recognised as a useful mode of human inquiry in situations where we are as active in changing situations as we are in explaining the situation and those changes. It is also why action research requires intellectual skills different from those used in conventional academic tradition. Action research integrates action (change) and research (explanation, understanding) so it's suitability depends on the task at hand.

MF *Action learning and action research are often marketed as a solution for the 'real world'. I have a problem with this description since it insinuates that academia is 'unreal' and the business world is 'real'. In my fields of Chinese Studies (film, literature and cross-cultural communication) and Law, we know that 'reality' is a construct, a perception, and that it is often manipulated. So, this understanding about*

'the real world' is now outmoded. How could we recast ALAR?

OZS *I fully agree with your observation and I recognise that it also applies to ALARPM. 'Reality' and 'truth' are theory-dependent constructs and may vary from person to person. When the business world conceives of academia as 'unreal', with academics confined to their ivory tower, it is probably – as Richard Bawden once explained – because academics see their role as generating theory about action, and not mixing this role with generalising theory in and through action.*

So, to recast the notion of action research, I suggest that we distinguish between research that yields theory/information only, and research that yields theory/information as well as improved practice (action, change). The latter is action research. I have defined action research in my CRASP model (Zuber-Skerritt 1992a:2, 1992b:15) as follows.

Action research is:

*Critical (and self-critical) collaborative enquiry by
Reflective practitioners being
Accountable and making the results of their enquiry public,
Self-evaluating their practice and engaged in
Participative problem-solving and continuing professional
development.*

MF ***Do you think that the method sits somewhere between (educational/management) rationalism and entrepreneurial individualism? That perhaps it introduces an empowered sense of community into the workplace?***

OZS *I think this question is inspired by recognition of the crucial roles of collaboration and risk-taking in this method. However, I think the method of action learning and action research is definitely not located in rationalism or in entrepreneurial individualism, but in what our colleagues*

at Griffith University, David Limerick and his associates, used to call 'collaborative individualism'. This means empowerment of the individual and clear recognition of the interdependence between individuals in 'the new organisation' of the present and future.

On the basis of their research, these authors identify a number of key characteristics, competencies and skills of collaborative individuals that they develop in greater detail in their book (Limerick & Cunningham 1993:114–59): autonomous, proactive, empathetic, intuitive and creative, transforming, politically skilled, strong at networking, and mature. These are also key characteristics of action learners and action researchers.

MF *So, should we call ALARPM something else?*

OZS *That's a very difficult, complex question. I've asked it often myself when I've tried to avoid using the 'action' terms, especially in competitive grant applications to be judged by traditional academics.*

But why should we change the terms and language to suit traditional academics? I think we must remain truthful to our paradigm and practise what we preach. I recognise considerable potential for traditionalists to eventually recast their fields of endeavour to include ALARPM in theory, practice and praxis. That is my optimistic view, and it is happening already. I think that ALARPM proponents will use their paradigm to institutionalise ALARPM further as a legitimate approach. Ironically it is because ALARPM offers ways for action/change as well as critique, that ALARPM can induce change in the dominant paradigms that try to subvert it.

The three separate traditions that were brought together in ALARPM took many years to gain ground. But synthesised as ALARPM, they have really gained credence in academic and business circles in the past decade. I think

this augurs well for ALARPM in the years ahead. I'm especially optimistic since we're living in times of rapid technological and social change, precisely when the strengths of ALARPM are best demonstrated. The only recommendation I would make is to change the name from ALARPM to ALAR since process management is integral to both action learning and action research.

MF *On that optimistic note, let's finish this interview. Thank you, Ortrun, for your time.*

OZS *My pleasure. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the field.*

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Appendix 1

This appendix summarises in point form some key features of Kurt Lewin's work on, and through, action research:

- concepts of action research (Appendix 1.1)
- the 'thematic concern' (Appendix 1.2)
- action research steps (Appendix 1.3)
- moments in action research (Appendix 1.4)
- types of outcomes from action research (Appendix 1.5).

Appendix 1.1

Lewin's Concept of Action Research

- Conceptually crucial are the ideas of *group decision* and *commitment to improvement*.
- Those affected by planned changes have the primary responsibility for 1) deciding on courses of critically informed action that seem most likely to maximise improvement of practice and 2) evaluating the results of strategies tried out in practice.

Appendix 1.2

Thematic Concern

- Action research is participatory, collaborative research that typically arises from the clarification of some concerns generally shared by a group.
- Participants describe their concerns, explore what others think, and probe to find what it might be possible to do.
- In discussion they decide what is feasible to work on, i.e. a group project.
- The group identifies the project's thematic concern.

Appendix 1.3

Action Research Steps

1. Reconnaissance – initial reflection on your situation in light of thematic concern.
2. Planning for improvement.
3. Enacting the plan and observing how it works.
4. Reflection – analyse, synthesise, interpret, explain, draw conclusions.

Appendix 1.4

The Four Moments of Action Research

Planning critically informed action to improve what is already happening;

Acting to implement the plan;

Observing the effects of critically informed action in the context in which it occurs;

Reflecting on these effects as a basis for further planning, critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles.

Appendix 1.5

Types of Outcomes from Action Research

In action research we look for changes in three different aspects of individual work and the culture of groups:

- Changes in the use of language and discourses – how people actually identify and describe their world and work;
- changes in activities and practices – what people are actually doing in their work and learning; and
- changes in social relationships and organisation – how people interrelate and how their relationships are structured and organised within the organisation.

Gloucester Street Community Group Action Research Report

Lyndell Turton –

Abstract

A community-based action research model has been utilised to assist a group of residents in a suburban Brisbane street to identify future community development actions to progress the effective functioning of their neighbourhood group. Interviews with participants allowed group members to reflect on the development and achievements of the group and facilitated discussion for future actions. A literature search provided insight into the operations of local government and into positive community development principles. The neighbourhood group has negotiated with the council in relation to street calming and other changes, which would improve street liveability. The group feels confident with the progress to date. The reflection on this progress is timely as the members identify they have made progress, yet have a desire to build a more cohesive team and take a more active role in community planning. A copy of this report will be made available to the members of the neighbourhood group who have identified a need to meet and plan future activities. The next phase of the process will be for the group to implement an action plan identifying willing individuals who will action each item on the plan within allocated timeframes.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to analyse the results of data gathered from a small number of participants who are

members of the Gloucester Street Community Group (GSCG). The report has been initiated due to requirements of a university assignment and it will be submitted to the course coordinator for assessment. Community-based action research forms part of a Master's in Social Administration. The report will also be made available to the members of the GSCG to provide them with feedback from the interviews in which they participated and to assist the group to implement actions in the future.

Issue

As an activity for an assignment for a University of Queensland course, I had to undertake a research project in a community setting. Data was gathered from the members of the GSCG by expecting them to answer the following question.

Research Question

How do Gloucester Street Community Group members intend to pursue community development in the future?

Context

The GSCG is a group made up of residents in a small suburban street in Brisbane, Australia. The group formed in 2003 with the common goal of addressing traffic management in the street to improve street liveability. The group has met regularly over this time and has engaged in a community development planning process with the local Brisbane city councillor and several council representatives. The group has developed into a cohesive team with skills from the members complementing each other. To date the experience of the GSCG has been one of barriers at different levels in local government and yet a level of support from the local councillor has provided the group with the hope that participation will be promoted at all levels of the council in time. The relationships formed between members of the

GSCG have been very positive and the group has the capacity to continue to engage positively with local government.

Other activities have evolved within the group, such as shared meals where group members have cooked and shared food from their own culture, and gatherings for informal social activities. The group has been active in negotiating with council to upgrade the street's kerb and channelling and to increase the number of trees planted. Group members have formed a watering team to care for the trees. Since the forming of the GSCG there have been many achievements not the least of which has been capacity building through shared experiences and developed relationships. Significant learning has occurred with group members becoming more knowledgeable of the methods of government operation, and a growing awareness of the group's collective ability. Networks have been established with other groups in the neighbourhood and there is an increase in community pride.

There has also been some financial capacity building. Regular contributions from members are used to pay costs associated with correspondence and postage. There was significant cost in employing a consultant to conduct an analysis of the traffic calming requirements for the street. To fund this cost a garage sale was conducted to which group members contributed items for sale. A percentage of the profits from the garage sale were used as payment for the consultant. Individual contributions from street residents made up the total payment.

This research project will facilitate enquiry into the future functions of the GSCG and give members the chance to explore their own experiences through providing participants, as members of a small community group, with the opportunity to tell their story. Stringer (1999) advocates the use of an action-based research approach as it allows participants to identify, without external influence, their own issues and to be proactive in solving their own problems to

improve their quality of life. While it may sometimes be difficult to determine where a study begins (Stringer & Genat 2004) this research has been initiated to meet requirements for a university assignment. However, the GSCG is a genuine group of people who have had significant success in their group efforts to date and research at this stage is timely. This research is a way for the group members to focus on group issues and its future. The group was initially formed to improve the safety and liveability of the street. Having major improvement well on the way to implementation, part of the function of the group has been realised. Using the Look, Think, and Act research cycle allows the researcher and the group members to explore the issues and to develop and refine the research question to accurately reflect group interpretation of events (Stringer & Genat 2004).

The stakeholders in the GSCG are the members. There is a small elected management committee, a president, secretary and treasurer, and several general members. Some members are more active than others due to their availability. For example, some members have small children and are sometimes busy caring for them when meetings are held. Other members are elderly and may not have the physical health to enable them to participate actively.

Procedures

Data Gathering

I conducted interviews with three of the GSCG members both male and female. With careful selection of the interviewees I was able to include a cross section of the group including John, an active member, Mary, the secretary and Desley, a less active general member. I approached the interviewees (whose names have been changed to protect their identity) and they all agreed to be interviewed. I conducted two interviews with each person. The first interview provided a general picture of the participants' thoughts and feelings about their involvement in the group

and their expectations for future group function. The second interview allowed the participants to expand on their experiences and facilitated the use of the 'look, think and act' research model described by Stringer and Genat (2004). It provided further data, which in turn stimulated further reflection and analysis. The second interview added information, which enriched, enhanced and clarified the data (Stringer & Genat 2004).

Stringer and Genat (2004) advocate creating an interview environment where the participants feel comfortable and free to express their thoughts and feelings. Participants were interviewed in a safe relaxed environment of their choice, which in all cases was their own home. They were interviewed individually. The way in which the people were interviewed allowed them to focus on their world and to understand their perception of events and future actions. I used written notes to record the interviews with the participants and used member checking to ensure the notes accurately reflected the person's intended responses. Stringer and Genat (2004) describe disadvantages such as participants feeling uncomfortable with other forms of recording, such as tape recording, and therefore I decided to avoid these more technical forms. My intention was to ensure the participants felt as comfortable as possible.

I used questioning techniques as described by Stringer and Genat (2004) such as grand tour questions for example, "The Gloucester Street Community Group has been formed for some time now. Could you please tell me about your experience as a member of this group"? Mini tour questions will also be utilised such as, "You talked about the number of meetings you have attended with the local councillor. Can you tell me more about the outcomes of those meetings?" I also used further prompting questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on their experiences, for example extension questions (Stringer & Genat 2004). An example of an extension question is: "Tell me more about how you feel about the car which is often parked in front of your home?"

Herbert (1990) states that a carefully formulated question may provide useful answers. Readers of the research probably might identify a meaning and a reason for asking the question. It probably might mean something to them. The question also needs to raise a feeling or interest in the researcher (Padgett 1998). The question I have formulated is something which interests me and I believe will be interesting to the members of the GSCG. It is a question that many community groups could ask and which will provide useful information for community groups. I also need to be aware that the question may evolve and change according to the thoughts of the group participants.

The interview transcripts are written recordings of the discussion with the participants. Denzin (2001) connects the interpretive approach with the works of many scholars and describes its existence in several forms in many different disciplines. However, Denzin (2001) narrows the field to describe one version of interpretation named interpretive interactionism, which is a qualitative approach that explores the life experiences described by participants and focuses on epiphanies. An epiphany is a dramatic event in someone's life (Denzin 2001). It is a significant event that may cause disruption and will be the focus of someone's life story. Denzin (2001) describes several characteristics of interpretive interactionism which build a profile of a method of research that has grounding in feminist theory, follows Sartre's existentialism and facilitates participant's biographical account. Each person's experience is special to them and interpretive interactionism seeks to describe and capture these experiences (Denzin 2001). The history and the biography provide the researcher with the opportunity to identify the epiphanies and facilitate the identification of commonalities with other participants (Denzin 2001).

Stringer (1999) advocates the 'think look and act' cycle as phases of community based action research so that the researcher is regularly reflecting and builds a picture of how the issues can be addressed within the context of the research

and in collaboration with the participants. The research project usually begins with a problem (Stringer 1999). However, for the purposes of this research while there is no problem as such, the GSCG has reached a stage where reflection on the progress and on the goals for the future will be of benefit for the members. The collaborative nature of community-based action research will enable the members of the GSCG to achieve the goals they continuously identify for the group (Stringer 1999). Stringer (1999) proposes that solutions to problems need to be determined by the people who are central to the community, in this case the members of the GSCG.

Data Analysis

The method used for examining the collected data and for distilling the data to represent the stories as told by the stakeholders is an epiphanic analysis of the events, thoughts and feelings as described in the interviews. Effective epiphanic analysis needs to be supported by rigorous member checking to ensure accuracy (Stringer & Genat 2004).

Report Construction

A written report will be developed from the research project and in this report the views, thoughts and opinions of the participants will be revealed. It will be an ethnographic account (Stringer & Genat 2004) that will capture in depth the descriptions the participants give. Their stories will be explained using the technique of thick description (Denzin 2001), which provides a more detailed interpretation of an action. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) describe ethnography as an understanding of people's use of personal experience to guide their behaviour. Crucial to the correct interpretation of the meaning of the participants' dialogue and the intent of their words is the level of understanding of the interviewer (Denzin 2001).

Ethical Procedures

I obtained consent from the management committee to conduct the research as described with the GSCG and gave the group the undertaking that consent will be obtained prior to interviewing the participants. I developed a consent form which each participant signed prior to the first interview. If any of the participants had been unwilling to sign the form I was prepared to select another member of the group to interview for the research. I reassured each participant that all the data will be de-identified in the written report, that any photographs will only be used with the written permission of the subjects, and that all data will be kept in a secure cabinet to which I alone have access. I am also aware that the detail of an individual's interview and identification of any individual cannot be shared with other members of the group. I reassured the participants that I would not be divulging this information during casual conversations with neighbours.

Checks for Rigor

Guba and Lincoln cited in Padgett (1998) describe trustworthiness as a necessary component to establish rigor in a qualitative research project. The researcher must honestly convey the true experiences of the respondents. Padgett (1998) describes six strategies for enhancing rigor. These are prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer support, debriefing, and member checking, negative case analysis and audit trial.

The rigor of the research was ensured by regular member checking through the interview process and by triangulation (Stringer 1999) through the use of three interviews to provide several data sources. Through careful comprehensive reporting the research project will be described to facilitate dependability, confirmability and transferability to other

settings, which Stringer (1999) describes as essential components of rigor so that others can apply the research to other contexts. Rigor will be established by the way the data is gathered, explored and analysed within the multiple action research cycles (Coghlan & Brannick 2001).

Philosophical Rationale

This research project has been based on the writings of Stringer (1999), chosen because of the interpretive nature of the method as opposed to the objective scientific methods of research. This research model as described by Stringer (1999) is promoted by Denzin (1997) in literature, which upholds an ethnographic practice within a philosophical framework of phenomenology. The *Stanford Dictionary* (2005) defines phenomenology as the “study of structure of consciousness from the first person point of view”. Van Manen (cited in Pinar & Reynolds 1992) describes hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology as “human science research”, providing us an insight into the world of the other person.

The data collected in this research project is qualitative data and the design employed is a phenomenological methodology, which attempts to reveal the lived experience of the GSCG members (Pinar & Reynolds 1992). It is one method of qualitative research (Padgett 1998), which is recursive and flexible in contrast to quantitative research design which unfolds in a linear fashion and has a structured and defined sequence of events. Qualitative research moves back and forth through the stages of a project and the researcher may refine and adapt the question and introduce new samples of respondents (Padgett 1998).

Marcus and Fischer (1986) describe ethnography as a research process in which a recorder is engaged in fieldwork to understand the lives of others. From this experience a descriptive report is written for the benefit of others. There is a growing urgency in recording the stories of different cultures and researchers are being encouraged to employ

interpretive means to understand the world of others. This provides strength to the argument that culture is important and experience is complex (Marcus & Fischer 1986). Spradley and McCurdy (1972) describe culture as “everything that has been learned by a group of people”. It is the framework used to generate and interpret social behaviour, which guides people in the way they live. A researcher’s description of the people’s knowledge and relationships within this culture is what is known as ethnography. The methods employed in semantic ethnography mean the observer is guided by the participants and will seek to learn from the participants instead of using his/her own culture to interpret events (Spradley & McCurdy 1972). Hardiker and Littlewood (cited in Herbert 1990) agree that qualitative research is most effective and useful in natural settings. Padgett (1998) describes qualitative research as a way of describing, through the use of thick description, the “worlds of respondents in an holistic manner”. The reason for conducting this form of research is to explore the experiences of the individuals as they know and understand it.

Stringer (1999) describes community-based action research as participatory and “a search for meaning” with an intended outcome of change that will “enhance the lives of the participants”. Accounts of this type of research must be evocative and empathetic with a focus on the daily lives of the participants (Stringer 1999). Action research is context specific (Hart & Bond 1995). Individuals identify issues and interpret them within their own unique framework (Stringer 1999). The theory of community-based action research as described by Stringer (1999) comes from the writings of Denzin (cited in Stringer 1999) who advocated a model based on an ethic of caring which has emerged philosophically from standpoint epistemology and which has an origin in feminist theory. Qualitative research varies in epistemological stance but is also inductive and naturalistic (Padgett 1998). Hart and Bond (1995) argue that empowerment is an important attribute of community

development work and that action research involves the participants determining the changes that will result. The emphasis is on collaboration and empowering the participants to become researchers in their own right (Hart & Bond 1995).

Stringer (1999) advocates the 'think look and act' cycle as phases of community-based action research, which allows the researcher to regularly reflect. This technique builds a picture of how the issues can be addressed within the context of the research and in collaboration with the participants. While there is no problem as such for the GSCG as indicated in a previous section, the GSCG has reached a stage where reflection on the progress and on the goals for the future will be of benefit to the members. The collaborative nature of community-based action research most probably will enable the members of the GSCG to achieve the goals they continuously identify for the group. Stringer (1999) proposes that solutions to problems need to be determined by the people who are central to the community (Stringer 1999) - in this case the members of the GSCG.

Coghlan and Brannick (2001) describe action-based research as a problem solving collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants, which not only identifies actions to solve the problem but also gathers new information to facilitate the implementation of the actions. Lewin (cited in Coghlan & Brannick 2001) identifies action research as being focused on real problems, cyclical in nature, including an education component, challenging, as well as being a contribution to knowledge of social science. Gummerson (cited in Coghlan & Brannick 2001) describes action research as holistic interactive research, conducted in an ethical framework that produces solutions to problems. The research is an agent of change. Stringer (1999) describes community-based action research as a collaborative model of research not always perceived as scientific. Coghlan and Brannick (2001) suggest action research does not have to justify itself in the scientific world but instead is evaluated

within its own frame of reference. Constraints of scientific research may be too rigid to allow the voices of the people to be heard (Stringer 1999). Researchers should avoid rigid adherence to an objective model and instead listen to the stories of the people and work with themes as they emerge (Stringer 1999). Coghlan and Brannick (2001) argue that the focus should not be on a debate of the epistemological or methodological perspectives of action research but rather by determining if the research is good; "...good research is purposeful, it's goals are clearly defined and significant, the methodological procedures defensible, evidence is systematically analysed and the 'objectivity' of the research clearly evident". Good action research tells a story with rigorous reflection, and extrapolation of useable knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick 2001). Individuals identify issues and interpret them within their own unique framework (Stringer 1999). It is important that interpretation of events within the story is the participants' and not an interpretation by the researcher (Coghlan & Brannick 2001).

Outcomes of the Study

Conducting the Interviews

The interviews have been conducted and the analysis completed according to the timeframe on the action plan. The procedure for arranging the interviews commenced with the initial contact with the office bearers of the GSCG to ask permission to conduct the research. With the executive being agreeable I then approached three members of the group and asked if they would be interested in participating in an interview process about the group to gain input for this research project.

As each person agreed, and they all did so quite enthusiastically, I provided them with a copy of the consent form and suggested they could read the details on the form at their leisure, and I would collect the signed form, if they were willing to proceed, when we met for the interview. I

then organised a mutually agreeable time for an interview with each individual. At the appointed time I arrived at the home of the participant and we progressed through the interview procedure. To begin proceedings we had a general discussion about their day and what had been happening as a way of relaxing and becoming settled into the interview. With the first participant I then commenced with the question and asked him to respond. I changed this method for the second and third participant as it seemed to make it difficult for them to commence. For these participants I suggested they reflect on the group activities and what it had meant for them while considering what they would suggest the group could accomplish in the future. This seemed to be more productive and easier for the participants.

I used grand tour questions, and member checking frequently throughout the interviews. During the interviews I made written notes after having first sought the participant's permission. I didn't use a tape recorder as I was aiming to conduct an informal interview more like a conversation between two people. However, I was conscious that I needed to allow the participants to tell their story and not to impose my own thoughts and beliefs on them. Following each interview I thanked the participant and asked if I could come back to refine the discussion further. The participants agreed. Following each interview I immediately reviewed my notes and rewrote words where I had used abbreviations. This assisted me to accurately analyse the data.

The next stage was to analyse some of the data from each interview, identify the epiphanies and to group the features and elements of the participants' experiences according to the epiphanies. I collated the data and provided each participant with a copy. This provided them with an opportunity to review the interview records to check for accuracy and to stimulate further discussion in relation to the future activities of the GSCG at a second interview. The second interview was an opportunity to explore any

concerns of the participants, discuss further suggestions and ideas and identify any additional data. This equates to the cycle of look, think and act that is described by Stringer (1999).

There were several difficulties associated with the research. Arranging the interview times produced some challenges due to work and family commitments. Participants also have commitments to activities such as sport on weekends, so interviews had to be conducted in the evening. One interviewee was caring for her young child during the interview and was interrupted several times with the requests from the child. This tended to distract the interviewee and myself and the content may have been affected by this. However, while all attempts are made to conduct interviews in an ideal environment, research which involves interviewing people on their home patch would seem to me to be fraught with difficulties and the challenge is to work around the obstacles which come our way. Having said that the child interrupted the interview, it was also enhanced by the child as the environment was familiar to the participant and the family atmosphere was relaxed.

The problems I experienced were varied, mainly due to my inexperience as an interviewer as I was hesitant about asking people to give up so much of their time, given that it was at my request and not something they had initiated. However, I found they were very generous. I experienced difficulty starting the interviews and as previously indicated adapted my approach by starting with a different question in the second and third interviews as I felt the first interview had begun in a clumsy fashion and the interviewee found it difficult to begin. I also found the member checking difficult and with the first interviewee I took so long to member check the content of the interview he fell asleep. If nothing else I then felt confident that he was relaxed during the interview process. For subsequent interviews I tried to member check more succinctly and more subtly but it is still something I find quite unnatural, although I am aware it is an essential

part of the project to ensure rigor. I have gained valuable experience from the practice interview I conducted during the class course week and because of that practice closing the interviews was easier and felt natural, however I believe I would have benefited from watching some role plays in the classroom setting to become more adept at other aspects of interviewing. I found concluding the interview difficult. It seemed at times we were discussing the same thing over and over and was conscious that we had probably reached a stage where the participant felt drained of ideas or thoughts.

I think there were some benefits but also some difficulties associated with being an active participant in the GSCG. Having an established relationship with all the interviewees was in some ways an advantage but also a disadvantage as conversation often went on to another tangent as in normal daily conversation. I found I had to draw the participant back onto the topic of the research. O'Regan and O'Connor (1989) agree it can be a difficult conducting research when the participants and researcher are friends.

Analysing the data has also been a challenge and correctly grouping the features and elements under the epiphanies has been a significant learning experience. I believe more practice with this in a supported environment such as the classroom would have been advantageous and may have helped me feel more confident of conducting the analysis correctly. A colleague warned me that the analysis would be very time consuming and this was an accurate prediction.

Outcomes of Analysis

Following a reflection on the research question, I reviewed the written transcript of the first interview. This resulted in identification of two epiphanies, Negotiation with the council (the Brisbane City Council (BCC)), and Inclusion and Participation. I then reviewed the transcript more thoroughly and in more detail to determine the feature and elements, which combine to support the epiphany. The features and

elements for each of these are listed in Appendix 4. One epiphany I have identified relates to the community development, relationships and capacity building of the group in the local environment. The second epiphany relates to the interaction to facilitate negotiation with the council to achieve the aims of the group. Data analysis of the second and third interviews followed the same format and with that data I created a collective account. With a larger group of participants some interviews may have been conducted within the group and results grouped into joint accounts to allow for comparison between groups (Stringer 2004). However, for the purposes of this small group I will be comparing and contrasting people's views and experiences from just three interviews.

Concepts derived from Data Analysis

Engaging with the Council

The group members have learnt from their negotiation with the council: "It has been helpful to learn how the council works and does business." They also have achieved an outcome whilst navigating within the existing structure of the council: "We are aware now that we are able to lobby and work hard to make a change." In the initial stages the group met with the local councillor and put forward a case. The purpose of the group is to make the street enjoyable and "a good place where people want to live", and to try to achieve a better lifestyle by reducing the traffic and noise in the street. Group members investigated the development proposals for the area and discovered new unit developments in the street will increase traffic flow. The council representatives conceded that the traffic situation in Gloucester Street was a special case given that the street wasn't a designated thoroughfare. The council representatives made an offer, which was rejected by the group and negotiations with the council resumed.

The group recognised there was an advantage in their collective power, rather than approaching the council as individuals. The council consulted with the group members and they took on board the suggestions the group provided. The council was kept accountable by the group's willingness to engage, resulting in some of the group's objectives being met. Now the council has proposed landscaping and street calming. Perseverance was required from the group members to put forward their ideas: "The councillor would not have continued on with it if we had stopped, they would have ignored us if they could." Already the group feels some sense of achievement through being able to maintain their goal and moving forward with what needed to be done.

Success of the negotiations relied on the whole group's participation. "It wouldn't have worked if we hadn't all participated". If any Gloucester Street resident objects to the current proposal the council won't proceed and the group members understand they need to work through this if it occurs. Some people may be more affected than others by changes to the street and some may have more to gain than others. For example, there is one family who own several blocks of land in the street which they may want to develop in the future so they probably have a different agenda to the majority of the group.

The group members believe they now need to follow through and continue to lobby the council. While the council have put forward a proposal this may change. The council may be waiting on input from the group. There is some concern that the council could consider the group has lost interest: "We've dropped the ball. We should contact the council and ask if they have any results or objections and are they at liberty to give us some detail." The group members are aware that personnel changes to local government departments occur frequently, so the group needs to maintain contact to ensure their interests are being represented: "We can take responsibility to be more active." The council will not drive the process if the community is not

active as they have so many other projects to consider. The community group needs to be the driving force.

Inclusion and Participation

There are some people who do not actively participate in the group, a choice they made in the beginning. "It could be called participation by proxy" as they didn't attend meetings but relied on feedback from other members and participated by signing the documents when required. The group would like to engage others more in the future, as one member has indicated: "I will continue to ask them to come and maybe if someone else asks too they will come."

Meeting tasks were shared according to the group members' expertise. Someone would record minutes of meetings and others would attend meetings with the council. Some group members did more work than others but they considered it normal. There were phases when one group member would engage and participate and then fade out and someone else would take his/her place, as one explained: "I needed to step back and not be so willing to take things on." People came and went at different stages but the group recognises that it might be harder to get everyone involved in the next stage if the proposal is not accepted.

There were times during the negotiation with the council when people did not agree: "There are some conflicts between people in the street"; but these issues were sorted out possibly through talking over the fence. One of the group members had the following to say in this regard: "One neighbour had an altercation with one of the others but that doesn't mean everyone has had a disagreement. We have a nice social time." The group can usually find a way to compromise and members were more in agreement than not.

Friendships have been formed as a result of the group's formation and sometimes group members may assume all members agree with each other "but people will say what they want to say in their own home". The same people

attend the group meetings. Often it is the same four or five families who meet and “it is a nice social time”. Sometimes members had difficulty in attending meetings because they were caring for young children and in these cases it was important for one of the group members to keep his/her neighbour informed of the outcomes of the meeting. Sometimes while this happened some information would be lost in the retelling. Each family recognised the importance of keeping their neighbours informed and on side, even those who were not permanent residents, as it was perceived the tenant had influence on the owner of their residence. Most residents have something to do with their immediate neighbours but not everyone does: “My neighbour is on her own with her children and wouldn’t initiate any contact and won’t come to any meetings but she does sign documents.”

Diversity

The group of people who live in Gloucester Street is diverse. There are people in the street who do not participate in meetings. In the future the group needs to engage with those who are not as involved as their opinions are equally important. It could be cultural or because of a perception that the group is representative of one socio-economic group. It may be advantageous for the group to take some time to reflect, as one suggested: “Take a step back and ask why they aren’t involved.” Those residents who held back at the beginning may now be finding it difficult to engage with the group.

There are significant cultural differences within the resident group, as one member has indicated: “The majority of people in the street live differently to me”; but it has enriched the group to have a diversity of cultures, ages and professions: “One thing I really enjoy is the involvement with the children.” Residents have found that meeting new people and getting to know their neighbours better, despite the differences in age and culture, has been a positive experience: “We are all much more involved than in other

circumstances”; “I would rather live in a place where there is diversity and a feeling of community”. While Gloucester Street has its own challenges, with proximity to hotels and an established homeless population it has appeal to the residents: “I visited a very wealthy friend in a new estate and yet I didn’t like it. It was like a ghetto. It was so sterile.”

Building Capacity

Building relationships between group members has been a positive experience for group members: “It has been good to get to know each other”: “I think we have had some good social gatherings such as the BBQs, the walking group, the children playing together more and neighbours relationships.” The group members have used effective communication and understanding to find common ground. Some residents have shown sensitivity to other’s cultural needs: “There are some things that I don’t talk about because some people are sensitive about them” and this is considered a successful function of the group and one which should continue: “Keeping up regular contact keeps the community going.”

The group members want to promote a positive culture in the street by ensuring all residents feel included and as if they can participate and feel comfortable in the neighbourhood. This is a goal for the future when “We can become less focussed on the infrastructure and become more community oriented.” The group made a significant financial commitment, for example with a successful garage sale, and they have shown commitment to the group by following things through: “We’ve been successful which is empowering.” Some members have been involved in other community action groups both in Australia and internationally but for others this was a new experience, and they have learned from the experience.

Actions Emerging

The participants identified actions they believed would assist them to promote the community development activities of the GSCG. They recognised the need to continue to engage with the council, and to pursue contact with the council as soon as possible to ensure the council is reassured of the group's commitment to improving the quality of life in Gloucester Street. One suggestion common to all participants was to increase the influence of the group on the council planning. Suggestions included having representation on the council community consultation committees and forming linkages with other community- based action groups in the area.

The participants also acknowledged the need to retain connection with their neighbours and to plan social activities to maintain strong relationships, as well as connecting more with other less well-known neighbours to ensure an inclusive group. The participants identified a need for neighbours to make a concentrated effort to seek out others who may be less confident and encourage them to participate in group activities. There was also a suggestion for members to form community bargaining groups where members identify required services, for example small building works and repairs and electrical maintenance. With a collective approach a more cost effective rate may be negotiated.

The group in the first instance have acknowledged that they need to meet to discuss future plans. At this proposed meeting, in which I will take part, an action plan will be developed to address the group's needs as identified in the research process. This will be a plan developed by the group members to ensure the group has ownership. I have developed a suggestion for actions, which I will provide to the group to assist with generating discussion. Limited time has not permitted the progress for the project to the action phase the group is committed to implement. It will be

beneficial for the group to continue reflecting on their achievements in the future and employ the 'think, look act' cycle to progress their community development.

Literature review

The themes that emerged from the interview analysis are explored in the literature review in the following section.

Community Development

Having analysed the data resulting from the interviews I then reviewed relevant literature to identify commonalities with other like groups and activities, and to identify the lessons that could be learned. The GSCG was initially established using a community development framework utilising some of the philosophies of community development work. Ife (2002) argues that community-based structures have become a vehicle of change and community development is viable and sustainable in meeting people's needs. According to Ife (2002) "Collective action can be much more powerful and effective than individual action". In the initial stages the only outcome may be increased understanding but this is positive and valuable (Ife 2002). The goals may expand as the group develops. A strong common source of energy will sustain a group to build a sense of community. Conflict will occur as a natural part of life but conflict in a group with mutual values, ideals and vision is resolved in a healthy way (O'Regan & O'Connor 1989). Building self-esteem and confidence is an important component of a strong confident community (O'Regan & O'Connor 1989).

The opportunity to reflect on the group's progress was timely as the group had been formed for three years. Action-based research is described by Lippitt (cited in Coghlan & Brannick 2001) as a procedure where the participants collect data, review the data and "...take some form of remedial or developmental action". There will be opportunity for change

and the community has the option of identifying actions as the need arises and as circumstances change over time (Ife 2002). People need to be fully informed if they can be expected to participate effectively in decision making (Ife 2002) and the GSCG will have the advantage of having reflected on their achievements and identifying their goals for the future. It is important that goals are set and these goals need to be established by the participants themselves (O'Regan & O'Connor 1989).

All the participants who were interviewed identified that they enjoyed socialising with their neighbours and that this should form part of their activities in the near future. O'Regan and O'Connor (1989) support this concept stating that they believe it is important that some time is taken for celebrating. One of the best ways for doing this is by eating together which is a very important element of community development. There doesn't have to be a specific reason for celebrating and it doesn't matter what form it takes (O'Regan & O'Connor 1989).

Mackay (1999) argues that humans are "herd animals ... social creatures" whose best defence is to stick together. "Grazing with the herd is an important step towards reconnecting with the herd." We need to nurture our personal relationships and participate more in activities to reconnect with the community in order to build a psychologically and culturally healthy society (Mackay 1999). "The capacity we have to live and work in groups is intrinsic to our way of life" (Eckersley 1998). The pressures of a globalised society mean we no longer accidentally meet and greet people. We are busy and more remote in a society that communicates electronically (Cox 1995) and so we must make more effort to connect. The first challenge the GSCG had in the initial stages of formation was to develop relationships. Most people had not met apart from very brief encounters as they passed each other in the street. Mackay (1999) believes our most precious resource is each other.

Social capital is essential for civil society's survival (Cox 1995).

Robert Putnam (cited in Cox 1995) identifies that people who are willing to contribute their time and to put effort into their community develop strong bonds. This may require people to reach outside their usual networks (Cox 1995) and connect with people who are of different backgrounds, beliefs and cultures. We need to be confident to disagree and debate but at the same time respect the opinions of others (Cox 1995).

There are eleven houses in Gloucester Street and the occupants of these houses represent eight different countries. Mackay (1999) believes that Australians are very hopeful for the future and that this hope is transferred to a greater connection with their neighbourhood and an "acceptance of our inherent strength and richness of our hybrid culture". "We are in the midst of a significant cultural shift" and "becoming a truly multicultural society" (Mackay 1999). We can celebrate diversity as part of our identity, with one component of this diversity being multiculturalism (Mackay 1999).

In contemporary society we are rediscovering the importance of community. We're acknowledging each other more and tolerating differences more easily (Mackay 1999). It may be difficult to keep in touch with our neighbours but it is possible and with hard work a village neighbourhood can be created (Mackay 1999). "The dream of village life is natural and legitimate" (Mackay 1999). People need to be encouraged to establish connections with others in the neighbourhood. It was assumed in the past that a sense of well-being would be assured by adequate income but Eckersley (1998) disputes this and identifies the connections we have with family, friends, workmates, neighbours and the wider community as intrinsic to our quality of life. The effectiveness of these linkages provides a measure of our sense of well-being (Eckersley 1998).

GSCG meetings provided an excellent opportunity for social gatherings, which were enhanced by sharing between cultures and discussion between members. Kelly and Sewell (1988) observe that “community building must make a difference” and needs trust, openness and a “sense of common cause” in order to survive. Howe and Cleary (2001) believe that people are willing to become involved in their own communities. Principles of collaboration, representativeness and inclusiveness are fundamental to community empowerment (Howe & Cleary 2001) and Cox (1995) supports this by stating that groups are more productive if they work together and make decisions collectively. In the GSCG significant learning has occurred with group members being more aware of the methods of government operation, and a growing awareness of the group’s collective ability.

Local Government Engagement

In the Queensland Government Community Engagement Division’s Directions Statement (2001) the vision is articulated as “involved communities-engaged government”. The BCC echoes this theme with statements about an inclusive approach to planning through the ‘Living Villages’ project, the ‘Suburban Centre Improvement’ project, and ‘Bringing life to the Suburbs’ strategy to introduce neighbourhood planning to enhance community participation (Brisbane City Council 2005). Knowledge of the vision and planning proposed by the council was gained by the GSCG during the course of negotiations with the council. The group at times became frustrated with the council progress and this has been a strong theme through the interview transcripts.

The BCC has a series of newsletters and provides opportunities for feedback from the community through an initiative, titled *Your City Your Say*. Newsletters discuss planning for the future and describe the collaborative relationships between the Council and the Queensland

Government (Brisbane City Council 2005). A new plan, titled 'SEQ 2026 Regional Plan' demonstrates this relationship. The plan was developed by State Government and supported by local government. In the *Your City Your Say* newsletter the BCC describes how residents can have a say in the development of their neighbourhood. Currently the BCC on its website provides information to residents on their potential involvement in planning: "Neighbourhood planning is one way every resident can influence the kind of city we have in the future" (Brisbane City Council 2005). Planning methods are to hold workshops and to conduct surveys. Resultant collated data was discussed at a recent conference, which included government, industry and resident representatives who discussed future development models for Brisbane.

The BCC 'Your City Your Say' program states "the underlying philosophy of Neighbourhood planning is 'collaboration' - Council working closely with local communities" (Brisbane City Council 2005). Development of communities is seen to be a combination of material development as well as people development (Kelly & Sewell 1988). Good planning, which will promote this development includes increasing the community's capacity and needs government involvement to promote the community in its cause (Chantrill 2005). The GSCG has an opportunity to capitalise on the current community engagement trends, which the council has committed to implement.

Conclusion

The members of the GSCG have participated in a community action-based research project which will provide them with data to assist planning their group development for the future. The project has been a learning exercise for the participants and the researcher and is the first attempt for all who were involved to gain skills in using the 'Look, Think, Act' model as a way of reflecting to answer the research question "How do Gloucester Street Community Group

members intend to pursue community development in the future?”. The participants reported feeling very positive about the project and believe it has been a valuable and worthwhile exercise. It has allowed them to focus on the future activities of the group and to identify action they can take to pursue their goal of improving the liveability of the street and to further develop as a strong cohesive community group.

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Action, ability and a future – A practitioner’s perspective on an ALAR role for skills development in South Africa

- Edmund Cumings

Action research helps reinforce and cement the belief that together we can make a difference.

– Carl Glickman

Background

One of South Africa’s (indeed Africa’s) greatest strategic needs is to raise skills and management abilities as competently and as rapidly as possible to help create and attract new businesses. New enterprises are essential for seeding new jobs. While mining, tourism, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and so forth are not insignificant, the bulk of new wealth-creating jobs will come from South Africa’s manufacturing sector. Local manufacturing must become internationally competitive in cost, quality and innovative appeal in order for this sector to expand capacity and lift employment rates. This will require sustained exceptional effort, national commitment and energetic, appropriate strategies, policies and staying power.

There is clearly no doubt at all that sustained literacy, education and quality training, collectively, will vitalise job creation and provide the highest survival potential for third world aspiring work-seekers. This paper explores a perspective that South African manufacturing industries (as the most competent, versatile and best equipped wealth

creating sector) can be incentivised and deployed to becoming an ALAR-rich national enabling force for poverty elimination.

A supporting reason for selecting manufacturing as a unique contributor is that this huge and vital industry is already well established and desperately short of skilled labour. All effort towards teaching and training has great strategic value that serves the national interest while developing specific skills in-house for the employer. A longer term national strategy already provides literacy programmes, schooling and higher education at universities of technology (previously known as technikons) for young people. Yet, there are still millions of unemployed late teen and adult work-seekers in South Africa, and its neighbouring countries. Many are from rural and tribal backgrounds, with minimal literacy abilities and almost no pre-exposure to first world work ethics and mores.

An expanding manufacturing base serves as a powerful magnet for essential new knowledge acquisition that, with training, drives its wealth creation and survival. However, this activity, while extremely large and dynamic, is only a part of a huge continuum of interdependent forces and energies (that include collective vision, national commitment, free enterprises and international investment) needed to elevate the nation away from poverty, crime, HIV/AIDS and other grinding contra-survival situations.

Literacy, education, training, housing and fostering cultures that value work ethics and effective rule-of-law, are all aided and influenced by the core stabilities and relative sanities of robust industries. Great good and vital confidence, hope and encouragement to do better still, will come with raised skills and rising employment.

The central intention of this paper comes from a belief that the South African job creation strategy needs dynamic vitalization, and a refreshed rallying mindset, that much more can be done faster and much more easily. It was

considered important that with new focus and vigour the nation must also reward what is wanted, and penalize what is not wanted in our society. Productivity and skills development wither without reward. Effective training, in the most productive inspiring locations that can immediately produce the greatest overall good, led to conclusions that private sector manufacturing industries are our richest and most competent resource. With their well-developed projects methodologies, bias for strong implementation and familiarity with change, they are best equipped and skilled to hammer out and contribute many useful exciting skills-creating actions to the nation as a whole.

ALAR in Context

This perspective invites a fresh serious look at the substantial scope of applications and benefits that ALAR methods encompass and offer. Action Learning and Action Research, as a methodology for enhancing Africa's survival outlook, ranges far beyond the basics as they are generally spoken about precisely because this practical methodology can be easily understood, tutored and easily deployed within any group intent on learning

Specifically, ALAR excels as a widely appropriate paradigm for solving problems and resolutely getting things accomplished.

When made a key part of a company's project management and problem solving procedures, ALAR, as a craft, introduces a requirement for researching and using new knowledge, while also utilising and innovating on existing abilities. Additionally, when action learning and action research are fused into a company's project management methodology, as a strategic additive, it becomes a core competency that will continuously be at work leveraging out competitive advantage for that enterprise. This kind of pervasive force for industrial excellence is what grows industry and employment and provides valuable multiplier

effects in any marketplace. Investment in industrial competence and learning might well prove to be one of the most rewarding forces for Africa to deploy towards finding its feet in a global economy. This is not all the answer, but manufacturing is an agile giant that South Africa already has solidly and successfully in place. Incentivising these South African industries to craft locally oriented win/win training and transformation tools can provide invaluable steerage to all sub-Saharan Africa.

The South African government has long recognized that it cannot achieve transformation without private sector involvement

ALAR Keypoints

Some illustrations of the scope and value in fostering the application of ALAR methods into training and learning are:

- Unlike more traditional research methods action cycles always have definite outcomes. Knowledge acquisition that is then put to use, and continuously shows results, sets up a culture for continuous learning. Action learning and research that targets corporate problems, and is used as an additional project delivery tool, will always align well with attainment of corporate goals and create competitive advantages. It is this kind of mindset (this blend of ALAR and innovation) that should be fostered towards becoming pervasive, that will secure durable corporate survival and found a 'learning organisation'. Changes in activities and practices – what people are actually doing in their work and learning.
- The ALAR cycle demands examination and implementation, or modelling, to test the quality of better methods. Stakeholders associated with corporate projects or programmes can, and should, be collaboratively engaged as an ongoing triangulation sounding board that provides rigor for the research that

is under way as a continual part of corporate activity. Stakeholders' inclusion in a company's ALAR activity, to some degree, immerses them into real work problem solving. Such contact often brings them closer as *de-facto* action team members (often steering committees), with whom affinities are raised. This is a characterization of some sort of ideal scene where important groups shift tone from critical to collaborative as they are drawn into contributing to research cycles.

- The reflection part of a solution step within a research cycle is itself a challenge to become responsive, innovative and, importantly, outward-looking. Personal contact and insight are developed and nourished (Patton 1990). A picture emerges of many skilled staff members creating a future facing the same way and collaboratively striving to produce superior performance for the enterprise as a whole.

This is what CEOs need and want, what they will support and champion - and what offers an unequalled learning platform for raising abilities among Africa's aspiring workforces towards a credible future.

- A very key point here is that ALAR team learning, by involvement and being strong on delivery, contains many of the advantages of apprenticeships with added educational management and leadership values (however embryonic at first). The gradient of induction that faces black South African trainees and newcomers, from rural to industrial livelihoods, can be very steep. ALAR in small project settings in the workplace can flatten and ease this path considerably.

The Results of ALAR Activity

Action research promotes and grows a culture of continuous learning on a confrontable gradient, with a flow of new knowledge driving directly on attaining competitive advantage for businesses. Of course project rich industries

might derive more benefit than others but in all cases fostering ALAR methods creates cultural shifts towards businesses becoming Learning Organisations. Learning strategies together with the management of knowledge (KM), and fostering pervasive innovation mindsets, are being championed as the most sought after and valuable competencies any business can have in order to face the future with confidence.

ALAR Activity in South African Transformation

The writer's employer and client multinational company has used ALAR-versatile project teams strategically for over twelve years. Certainty exists that ALAR methods have a place at any level of management to both help resolve major problems and to explore and exploit future competitive strategies. Projects and problems have foremost attention of stakeholders and CEOs and good results and solutions attract respect for teams, individuals and methods used. Indeed project teams earned a certain stature for their value, particularly in leading a cultural change for learning, and serving as a pool of instructors during periods of consolidation.

Although already stated earlier (and now put differently), the hot button in it all is the upward ALAR spiral for progress that imposes, over time, a normal working culture that always attracts germane knowledge, thrives on doingness and focuses on valuable final results to watchful contributing stakeholders.

South African national learning efforts need strong, reliable and workable anchor points that can be used from a young age up and through critical levels of development.

Training and developing skills that are undertaken within industries have shown to be more effective than in other spheres of South African life. Initial and growing successes with these initiatives here will help dispel misgivings and raise reality on competency creating methods and, indeed,

promote a growing ALAR-based grounding on learning how to learn. There is more need now than there ever has been in companies to compare, to discuss, and to agree frameworks for progress with government and trade unions.

Also, of huge importance, is the truth that productivity and good work are the bases of morale. It is on this assembly of learned, tried and observed benefits that this innovative approach is based. All the key sub-objectives for upliftment are met during a worker's transformation from (often) third to first world industrial mores.

South African industry needs to do much, fast and thoroughly, and in a manner that supports high productivity, fosters work ethics, cultivates non-patronising real self-worth, and satisfies employers, while making efficient use of government incentives.

This all amounts to crafting a durable transformation engine-for-change that will work in and for industry with the goal of setting examples for progress and growing a stable wealth creating, job creating, centre line while other transformation initiatives find their feet.

Many aspiring learner managers will have come from rural areas where English often is a second or third language. South Africa's strong first world work ethic, and demands for performance, impose steep learning gradients that can overwhelm many work seekers on the one hand, and frustrate employers on the other who expect to see a positive return on their labour, training and upliftment investments.

The Challenge

The challenge is therefore to get ALAR promoted and launched at many levels, and appreciated, accepted and applied resolutely within industries, technikons and universities as a start.

South Africa needs its wealth creators to grow and remain globally competitive and at the same time serve as effective implementers of learning, training and skills development.

Undesirable conditions and barriers to learning velocity (and these can include political and inherited issues) must be interrogated down to simple understandable objectives and resolved by empowered project teams assisted by ALAR problem solving know how. Action intervention will always yield positive (sometimes spectacular) returns and many synergies and opportunities for innovation.

Closing perspectives on Implementation

A few thousand committed companies (and other upliftment bodies), who will increasingly adopt ALAR skills-enhancing methods, will most certainly enjoy sustainable win/win returns and be recognized as leading the fight to turn out workers who thirst for knowledge, and work that produces wealth and wins the high ground for having all of Africa as a marketplace, while also leading upliftment on the continent. Collaborative and committed South African industry could provide a million extra jobs in just a few years provided they see the investment as being totally non-punitive and structured on incentive values.

There are papers that quantify the benefits from multiplier effects created by expansion, predominantly in manufacturing and IT which have uplifted whole economies. These multiplier benefits can be substantial and research into this within African settings will be reported on soon. Industrial islands of excellence are essential in South Africa as role models of picking up and closing the gap between rich and poor. Schools and colleges are simply often too disconnected from national industrial pressures and growing skills needs of (often adult) aspiring work-seekers, and the needs of employers. Training in industry (the suitability and fit of ALAR methods within it has been covered) provides an irreplaceable setting for fostering, instruction and *application*

of practical and cultural values, industrial vocabulary, work ethics, self-worth, fast implementation, and a bridge to modern work environments. CEOs and shareholders will readily recognise degrees of quantitative and qualitative rising-statistics, and to those degrees this sub-continuum of progress, led by manufacturing industries at first, will continue to receive committed support.

The challenge is therefore to get ALAR promoted and launched as an upliftment aid, and an action plan to get this done is under way.

** This perspective was written as a working assembly of views to be communicated during discussions with various labour and transformation bodies in South Africa.*

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Storytelling as Action Inquiry

- Geof Hill

Abstract

Using stories about people's experience as the basis for an investigation is a relatively new research methodology. It is generally positioned as a qualitative approach and sits comfortably in the post-positivism approaches of action and practitioner inquiries. It can also be considered a generative methodology.

The essential ingredient to the method is choosing stories as the data. The method is then developed by arguing for this particular approach and within that argument problematising a number of dilemmas such as:

- Which or whose stories?
- How to collect the stories
- How to draw meaning from the stories
- How to make use of the meaning gleaned from stories

Introduction

This paper arose out of a workshop I presented at the Annual ALARPM Conference in Sydney (Australia) in October 2005. The workshop responded to the conference title "Telling our Stories" and was also an update on my thinking about the use of stories of people's experience in investigations since an earlier ALAR publication (Hill, 2002a). In converting my workshop to a journal article I want to make explicit the approach that I have adopted.

Firstly I am writing about a methodology that I employ as an investigating practitioner (Hill 1997; Hill 2002b; Aspland, Hill & Chapman 2002; Sankaran, Swepson & Hill 2005). It is

also a methodology I use with clients to help them investigate aspects of their professional practice. In those senses this paper is written as Practitioner Investigation (Andersen & Herr 1999).

Secondly I am approaching storytelling as an inquiry methodology and specifically as an action inquiry methodology. This approach is in deference to the conference focus of Action Research.

Action Research is a disputed term. Even amongst different action research theorists there are differences of opinion about what constitutes action research. I am taking my definition from McNiff (2002:6) who defines action research as

a term which refers to a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be. Because action research is done by you, the practitioner, it is often referred to as practitioner based research; and because it involves you thinking about and reflecting on your work, it can also be called a form of self-reflective practice.

And Dick (2002) who defines action research as

a flexible spiral process which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time

When I talk about action research I use the alternate term 'action inquiry' to indicate investigations that are representative of efforts in research discourse to respond to problems with positivism (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Thirdly, I have written this paper from the perspective of a strengths-based approach (McCashen 1999) that seeks to identify and accentuate people's innate strengths to turn them into explicit skills. In that sense I would argue that many rigorous investigative methodologies are embedded in our day-to-day activities and by recognising this, and naming them as investigative methodologies, we can

strengthen them and develop the ability to use them rigorously. For example, most people in their day-to-day grocery shopping can determine which 'specials' are truly 'specials' by comparing weights, prices and other features of the product; many people when they are seeking services can distinguish between different quotations and choose one that suits their budgetary and service needs. These are investigative capabilities!

Applying a strengths-based approach to the investigative methodology of storytelling as inquiry would suggest that people have an innate ability to discern meaning from stories and that when this is recognised, this helps them to make those tacit skills explicit, and in so doing opens these investigative strengths to become rigorous investigative practice.

The story tradition

The Apprenticeship Tradition of Knowledge (Schrag 1992) was essentially an oral tradition, and while it linked predominantly to the workplace, at times it took a more general view of the world. Stories operated within this tradition. The Fairy stories and Fables with which I, and I suspect many others, grew up, provided guidance about ways to approach a range of situations. Whilst there may be cultural variations between similar stories, their themes seem to direct us along similar paths such as caution against harm, self-determination and escape from hardship.

Despite this history of use in meaning making, stories of people's practice have a relatively recent use as data in formal investigations. This may have been a result of the distinction made by the Ancient Greek philosophers between different types of knowledge. They distinguished between 'intellectual/theoretical' knowledge and everyday/practical knowledge. They considered everyday knowledge to be useful for decision making (Hamilton 1992:63) and yet "contaminated with error" (Polkinghorne 1989:20).

Theoretical knowledge, according to Aristotle, was knowledge that could be 'checked' and 'tested' (Hamilton 1992:63). Stories and the knowledge they disseminate, do not lend themselves to 'checking' and 'testing', would have thus been classified as everyday/practical knowledge, and not as such valued for decision making investigations.

Some of the recent popularity of using stories of people's experience as data in investigations has arisen out of the invigoration of practitioner stories in a range of practitioner disciplines (Andersen & Herr 1999). The discipline of Education has been in the forefront in recent years of celebrating practitioner stories (Clandinin & Connelly 1986). In Higher Education, the particular niche on which I have been focussed, these stories have been used to make explicit the processes for higher degree students (Comber 1999; Francis 1996; Hall 1998; Hanrahan 1998; Lovas 1980), academic staff (Ballantyne, Bain & Packer 1997) and research supervisors (Maor & Fraser 1995; Salmon 1992).

Positioning 'storytelling as inquiry' within investigative methodologies frameworks

One of the ways research methodologists distinguish between different investigative approaches is to classify them as Quantitative or Qualitative. Research based on evidence of precise units is described as "quantitative research", and research based on evidence of feelings, thoughts and meanings is described as "qualitative research" (Lewins 1992:42). In that sort of framework, the use of stories of people's experience as data would be seen as a qualitative approach. The investigator looks for the range of meanings that are evident in a story rather than attempting to make some precise statement.

An alternative way to classify investigations is to describe them in terms of their research paradigm. Following the inception of the notion of paradigm in Thomas Kuhn's (1962) thesis entitled *The Structure of the Scientific Revolution*, Guba

and Lincoln (1994) suggested that the bi-polar-based framework of describing investigations as quantitative or qualitative was outdated. They challenged the hegemony of investigative practice, suggesting that it was dominated by the positivist paradigm, a paradigm that maintained that Empirical Science is not just a form of knowledge, but the only source of positive knowledge of the world. They suggested that the entrenchment of this paradigm in investigative practices was so great that the word 'research' had inadvertently become synonymous with positivism. Their argument maintained that the positivist paradigm was inappropriate for investigations that involved people and proposed alternative research paradigms. They used the word 'inquiry' to describe their type of investigation that responded to the problems of positivism.

Several different inquiry paradigms emerged from this paradigm debate, producing a number of different investigative methodologies, among which were action inquiry and practitioner inquiry. The use of stories of people's experience as data sit comfortably both within action inquiry and practitioner inquiry, and as is argued here, can be presented as a methodology in its own right.

There is a third related framework for considering investigative methodologies. It explores whether the investigation seeks to generalise about its findings, as did many positivist investigations, or to be generative. By generative I mean that they seek to generate discussion. Rather than tying themselves to a single meaning they open up discussion to multiple meanings and initiate further investigations rather than making a definitive conclusive comment about their topic. When I have used the meanings gleaned from the stories of people's experience, I have sought to promote discussion amongst practitioners rather than to make generalisations about the particular practice. I acknowledge that there are multiple truths rather than a single truth and by being generative I aim to promote mutual

understanding about the multiple truths between different stakeholders.

Arguing for storytelling as inquiry

Within any investigation there must be an argument for the nominated investigative methodology. I believe that any issue can be investigated by a range of appropriate methodologies and this argument establishes the appropriateness of the nominated approach. It firstly argues how the nominated methodology is 'fit' for the specified investigative function (Dewey 1996). Then it argues for what will constitute the data, how the data will be collected and how meaning will be constructed from the collected data.

The argument for the choice of a methodology has traditionally, although not always explicitly, been presented from the standpoint that the methodology being proposed has been used previously on a similar issue and this then carries towards its suitability for the current issue. This type of argument is often presented with a description of the issue being investigated, specific reference to other similar studies that have used the nominated methodology and an argument showing how the salient features of the nominated methodology fit the salient features of the issue.

Following along these lines, an argument for storytelling as the methodology for an investigation would present information about the specific issue as being present in the stories practitioners or stakeholders told/tell about the issue and cite examples of this being done elsewhere. This is the approach I have used in the second paragraph of 'The story tradition' in this paper.

There is an alternative approach to arguing the choice of a methodology that works from the first principles or the paradigm of investigation. Guba and Lincoln (1994) have described the inquiry paradigm as consisting of the investigator's beliefs about truth (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology). Arguing for an investigative methodology

from first principles requires a statement of one's ontological and epistemological beliefs, then an argument showing congruence between the articulated investigative paradigm and the nominated methodology.

Following along these lines an investigator arguing for storytelling as inquiry would present an ontology (after for example Kelly 1955) acknowledging multiple truths, and an epistemology (after for example Schon 1985) recognising practitioner stories as a source of knowledge. From these premises they could argue that storytelling as inquiry is congruent with a constructivist ontology and a practice based or experiential epistemology.

The difference between the two approaches of arguing an investigative methodology is subtle and one might argue unnecessary. I maintain that the distinction is important in that it presents a third form of argument that holds for people undertaking an investigation into professional practice (Practitioner Investigation).

When a practitioner embarks on a formal investigation into a particular practice, they might initially explore a number of different methodologies to begin to understand formal investigations. Sometimes, within these descriptions of methodologies they may recognise an approach that is already established in their practice. This is often the case with action inquiry. The would-be investigator recognises that the iterations between action and reflection in their day-to-day practice are similar to what is defined as rigorous action inquiry.

Recognising an already established investigative methodology in one's practice could, from a strengths-based approach, be an acknowledgement of an investigative 'strength' and, in their argument for an investigation methodology the would-be investigator can argue for the continuance of this 'strength', and show how this 'strength' will be made more transparent and methodical such that, as

a rigorous investigative approach, it is more suitable for a formal investigation.

Many investigators reading the literature about storytelling as inquiry, recognise that they have been using stories of peoples experience as their data in day-to-day investigations. Following along these lines, they would identify this 'strength' in their practice, argue for a continuance of this investigative 'strength' as their investigative methodology, and then discuss how their 'strength' could be made more rigorous to accommodate the requirements for a more formal investigative approach. At the same time they may recognise an iterative nature in their use of stories of people's experience and also argue for storytelling as action inquiry.

Defining what is meant by storytelling as inquiry

The argument for a choice of methodology also requires a clear definition of the nominated methodology. Sometimes a chosen methodology will have established set of practices that define a process an inquirer needs to take. Francis's (1996:77) has suggested that this is like "joining a club". Storytelling as inquiry does have a 'club' of sorts in the small but growing body of literature that discusses the approach (Reason & Hawkins 1988; Denning 2001), but this literature is not as prescriptive as it may be for other approaches. More importantly, even in this small body of literature, storytelling as inquiry is already emerging as disputed territory. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (1994:416) differentiate between "story", which they describe as the phenomenon of the lives lived, and "narrative" which is the inquiry into that story often conducted by another. Denning (2001), on the other hand, suggests that stories about people's experience will "work" as vessels of knowledge if they are brief and if the tacit knowledge of the stories "springs" the reader to a new level of understanding. An investigator needs not only to nominate storytelling as inquiry as their proposed methodology, but they also need to clarify what the term means to them and to their investigative practice.

Problematizing the choice of stories of peoples experience as data

Having defined the type of one's nominated methodology, a second argument then discusses exactly what will constitute the data in this methodology, how the data will be collected and how meaning will be constructed from that collected data.

In an argument for storytelling as inquiry this again requires specifying one's choices amidst a range of distinctions. For example McNiff (2002) in her definition of action research talks about self-reflective practice. This would imply that the investigator's own story could be used as data. Alternately an investigator can argue to use the stories of other practitioners as the basis for reviewing a particular practice. While there is no 'correct' approach, an investigator needs to problematise the question of whose stories will be used as data.

There is a further question that also needs to be problematised: How will the stories be collected? Will they be written or told and recorded? In my own experience (Shankar, Swepson & Hill 2005) our initial choice to write stories was changed to an approach that involved telling our stories to each other, audio recording those stories and using the transcript of the audio recording as our data, because our initial written stories did not 'spring' us, as Denning's (2001) prescription had suggested, to new understandings. On another occasion (Aspland, Hill & Chapman 2002) I used an open interview technique to get stories of people's experience. I used a court reporter to convert the dialogue to transcript and then edited the transcript by deleting the interviewer questions to create a practitioner 'story'.

My intent in these examples is again to suggest that while there is no single 'correct' method for collecting stories, the investigator must describe their method so that it is transparent and can be seen to be emerging from their

problematizing the issues associated with choosing stories of people's experience as data.

Explaining the Analysis of Data

Earlier, in discussing a strengths-based approach to investigation, I suggested that people have an innate ability to discern meaning from stories. A story conveys meaning in its own right. Telling a story combines description along with explanation. As soon as events have happened and are told in retrospect then the story contains both the reconstruction of the events along with first reflective explanations of those events.

Writing a story, whether as a starting point or converting an oral story to writing, adds additional implications for the story analysis.

*Writing is a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping up activity at the end of the research project. **Writing is also a way of 'knowing' - a method of discovery and analysis** (my emphasis). (Richardson 1994:516)*

Reading and re-reading a story helps the investigator to recognise additional meaning within that story. Reading the story in the context of other literature can also help an investigator to recognise elements of a story that may have otherwise been unrecognised. I have called this process benchmarking (Hill 2002b). Where there are multiple stories being used as data there are additional meaning making possibilities by comparing and contrasting stories. There can be similarly expressed sentiments as well as references between the stories to each other's stories or common events. These duplications can add to the overall meaning of the collection of stories.

In the same way as reading and re-reading one's stories assists with analysis of meaning, writing and rewriting a

story can produce new elements. Denzin (1994) described this as moving from the field to the text.

Moving from field to text to the reader is a complex, reflexive process. The researcher creates a field text consisting of field notes and documents from the field. From this text he or she creates a research text. The researcher then re-creates the research text as a working interpretive document. This working document contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense of what has been learned. The writer next produces a quasi-public text, one that is shared with colleagues, whose comments and suggestions the writer seeks. The writer then transforms this statement into a public document which embodies the writer's self understandings, which are now inscribed in the experiences of those studied. This statement, in turn furnishes the context for the understandings the reader brings to the experiences described by the writer.
(Denzin 1994:501-2)

It is important, however, that in the re-writing the storyteller is the one making choices about improvements to the story. In a recent study (Shankar, Swepson & Hill 2005) two colleagues and I wrote stories from the perspective of thesis examiners. It was our intent to illuminate the process of thesis examination. We initially wrote stories of thesis examining, but, as I have mentioned elsewhere in this paper, these written stories did not spring us to new understandings (Denning 2001) so we changed our methodology and opted to tell our stories to each other, audio record those stories and use the transcript of the audio recording as our data. When we listened to each other's stories we made changes in our own stories because the act of listening to another's story made us clearer about what our own story needed to tell.

The stories were used in a journal article and as part of the editing of the article for the journal, we were asked to make changes to our stories. We resisted this request on the grounds that such changes would detract from the authenticity of the stories. However, when we re-read our

stories in preparation for a subsequent article (Hill, Sankaran & Swepson 2006) , we recognised that aspects of our stories which we felt had maintained confidentiality of material, may with the more local readership of this article, have been more readily recognised, and as story writers we again made changes to our stories. These processes of writing and rewriting led us to greater depths of understanding of the practices about which the stories were written.

Truthfulness (Authenticity) and transparency

Within the argument about what will be considered data, how it will be collected and how meaning will evolve from it, there is often some consideration about how the meanings will be used. Previously in this paper I have distinguished between investigations that seek to *generalise* and ones which seek to *generate* discussions.

When an investigation is seeking to generalise, the methodology arguments makes reference to issues of validity and reliability. Validity indicates the conclusions have logically arisen from the analysis and it is therefore appropriate to make generalisations from data. Reliability indicates that the analysis be replicated under the same conditions the same conclusions would be reached (Lewins 1992) and supports a choice to generalise about the findings.

The debate initiated by Guba and Lincoln (1994) regarding the appropriateness of positivist paradigms for investigating issues with people makes some reference to the notions of 'validity' and 'reliability'. Some authors see these terms as intricately linked to positivist ontology (Mischler 1990; Winter 2002) and choose to use alternatives such as 'authenticity' and 'transparency'. By this they mean that the data is authentic and has not been contrived to suit the purposes of the conclusions. This is particularly important where stories are re-written. By transparency they mean that they have made explicit their process of investigation so that

a reader may understand this rather than replicate it. I have sought to use both terms in this article.

The alternate terms of authenticity and transparency are important for storytelling as inquiry and action inquiry where stories are used as the data. Neither methodology claims to make generalisations. Neither methodology makes a claim that repetition of the investigative process will produce the same results. Both methodologies rest on the assumption of multiple truths and hence the approaches used must be both authentic and transparent.

New Directions

In writing about storytelling as (action) inquiry I have sought not only to make explicit my own approach to storytelling as inquiry, but to add to the greater body of literature about this particular approach. Storytelling as inquiry is a relatively new investigative methodology and comes alive as investigators use it, write about their use and discuss the problems they had in using this approach for investigations. My own experience has been that its newness generates a greater requirement to be specific about what one has done, as readers of this methodological approach carry into their readership many expectations about what makes appropriate and authentic investigation. The more investigators talk and write about storytelling as inquiry the more references there are for other investigators to cite in their own arguments for this investigative approach.

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Bridging the knowing-doing gap: action learning for teacher professional learning that leads to changed practice

- Lindy McKeown

Abstract

The gap that exists between what people in organisations know and what they implement of what they know in practice is described by Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) as the “knowing-doing gap”. Their research delved into the ways many organizations fail to turn the knowledge their staff gain from professional development activities into action in the form of changed practice for improved outcomes. It was this gap that concerned me when I was an Education Advisor servicing the professional learning needs of three districts of Education Queensland. A knowing-doing gap was identified in two vital elements of the professional development of educators. These were:

- The teacher knowledge – teacher practices gap;
- The professional development best practice knowledge – professional development practices.

This paper will tell the story of how the professional learning team in the district used Action Learning to bridge both these gaps and then went on to share this highly successful strategy through a state-wide program in Action Learning leadership.

Keywords: Action learning, teacher professional development

Background

In 2003, during the redesign process of the Ipswich and West Moreton Districts and their subsequent co-location, a capacity building model for operation was developed using the “aspects of capacity” described by Neumann, Youngs and King (2001) as:

- Teacher knowledge skills and dispositions;
- Professional community;
- Program coherence;
- Technical resources;
- Principal leadership.

Based on my years of experience in leading professional learning and my recent experience with Action Learning in the Northern Territory where I had been responsible for the professional development stream of the Learning and Technology in Schools Project (LATIS), I introduced into this re-design process the issue of the knowing-doing gap and the potential to introduce Action Learning to overcome this.

The challenge to provide high quality, effective professional learning opportunities that built the capacity of teachers and school leaders resulted in the adoption of Action Learning as one of the three key strategies within the districts. The other two strategies were the development of networks and clusters (professional community) and the provision of additional leadership development activities including mentoring and learning communities for small school principals (principal leadership). In combination, these strategies targeted three distinct groups – school leaders, lead-learners (those who influence others but may not have formal leadership roles) and practitioners. The use of these key strategies and clearly identified target groups underpinned the newly introduced Learning and Development Framework for planning district professional learning. Designing programs that integrated a range of systemic initiatives supported program coherence. This plan

was held up by central office staff as state's best practice as a model for other districts.

The rationale

The gap that exists between what people in organisations know and what they implement of what they know in practice is described by Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) as the "knowing-doing gap". Their research delved into the ways many organizations fail to turn the knowledge their staff gain from professional development activities into action in the form of changed practice for improved outcomes. Although they found no simple solution to the knowing-doing problem, they developed a set of eight guidelines for action that were based on the recurring themes that lead to this problem:

- Knowing why before knowing how;
- Knowing comes from doing and teaching others how;
- Action counts more than elegant plans and concepts;
- There is no doing without mistakes. What is your organization's response?;
- Fear fosters knowing-doing gaps, so drive out fear;
- Collaborate, cooperate, share and look after each other's welfare;
- Measure what matters and what can help turn knowledge into action;
- What leaders do, how they spend their time and how they allocate resources.

Empirical evidence was supported by the report Making Better Connections (Downes et al. 2001) on models for teacher professional development identified best practice across the world. A knowing-doing gap was identified in two vital elements of the professional development of educators in these districts. These were:

- The teacher knowledge – teacher practices gap,

- The professional development best practice knowledge – professional development practices.

Firstly, there is a knowing-doing gap between what teachers encounter at professional development and training events and the extent and type of use of that knowledge in schools. Schools and school systems have spent millions of dollars over the past two decades in Australia to establish ICTs and outcomes based education as part of the fabric of schools. Despite this massive investment, we still see many teachers with only the most basic skills in the operation of computers and with the dominant pedagogy that is little more than the transmission of knowledge.

Secondly, there is a knowing-doing gap, especially at a systemic level, between what is known about effective professional learning for adults and the design and implementation of professional development programs for educators (Downes et al. 2001; Fullan 2001). Vast amounts of published materials are available in books, journals and on the World Wide Web on both these topics, yet still these knowing-doing gaps exist.

To address the challenges of finding a way to bridge both these knowing-doing gaps, Action Learning has been used as an inquiry-based professional learning strategy to not only develop new knowledge and understanding but to simultaneously reflect on the implementation of this new learning in practice. The knowing and doing are inextricably linked in Action Learning. As a methodology for professional learning, Action Learning demonstrates the criteria, identified through extensive research (Downes et al. 2001; Fullan 2001; Guskey 2003) for what constitutes effective teacher professional development. Sustained inquiry through teacher research projects is one of the strategies strongly recommended by the research literature, yet it is the least common undertaken at a systemic level. (Downes et al. 2001). By changing the way teachers learn by incorporating a

“doing” element, we are able to simultaneously address both knowing-doing gaps.

Our story

During 2003 and 2004 in the Ipswich and West Moreton Districts, Action Learning Programs have been conducted related to a wide variety of themes including:

- Literacy;
- ICT integration including multimedia authoring, online collaboration and web publishing;
- Information literacy and inquiry based learning;
- Curriculum planning using an outcomes-based approach;
- Data driven decision-making;
- Syllabus implementation;
- Assessment and reporting reform;
- Aspirant leaders.

To develop the knowledge, skills and understandings of the District Office staff in relation to Action Learning, I conducted an Action Learning Leaders Program for personnel responsible for the facilitation of these programs. It was an Action Learning program about Action Learning, the medium was the message (McLuhan 1964). Each participant’s Action Learning project was to lead their own Action Learning program in one of the themes identified from the district data about common professional learning needs gathered from school planning documents including the School Annual Report and Operational Plans (SAROPs), the ICT Agreements, the Curriculum Plans and the Literacy Strategies.

This Action Learning Leaders Program was then run for school leaders and lead learners within the newly formed Tri-district of Ipswich, West Moreton and Corinda Districts. It then became the basis for a statewide Action Learning

Leaders program as an Australian Government Quality Teacher Program (AGQTP) funded initiative by the Joint Council of Teacher Professional Associations (JCQTA) and the Catholic Diocese of Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane. This program builds the capabilities of the participants to use Action Learning as a professional development strategy within their own learning communities. The participants included district office personnel, teachers and administrators from schools, staff from the Curriculum Strategy Branch of Education Queensland and the Queensland Studies Authority (who are responsible for new syllabus implementation statewide).

The AGQTP research report (Williams 2005) identified 85 participants who created 66 Action Learning Programs as their project during the leadership program. These programs were conducted for teachers at all levels of schooling from preschool to senior schooling, Vocational Education and Training Coordinators, special education staff, principals and project managers at district level. The themes were as diverse as the participants. This demonstrated the versatility of Action Learning as a professional learning strategy in a range of contexts with a range of audiences.

Conclusion

Action Learning is a proven professional development strategy that bridges the knowing-doing gap for participants. It also bridges the gap between the principles of effective professional learning and professional learning practice. It not only meets the current need of the learner but equips them with a process to develop the attributes of a lifelong learner (QSA 2002).

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Lindy McKeown is currently undertaking a full-time PhD at the University of Southern Queensland where her research is focussed on using Action Learning online. With 20 years local and international experience in designing and delivering professional learning for teachers specialising in the use of ICT and online learning, she has spent the last 4 years using Action Learning in face-to-face and online modes with teachers in Queensland and the Northern Territory. Over the past 2 years she has led an Action Learning Leaders Program for principals and teacher professional association leaders who went on to use the Action Learning methodology for teacher professional development in a range of contexts.

Noticeboard

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

**ALARPM 7th & PAR 11th World Congress
Participatory Research, Standards and Ethics
University of Groningen, The Netherlands
21 - 25 August, 2006**

The theme for this World Congress focuses and reflects on standards and ethics in participatory research practices: participatory action research, action learning, and process management. Moreover, it will focus on participatory research practices as processes of (self-) reflection and development of (professional) ethics.

Participatory research practices are meant to improve people's self-determination (empowerment) in the role of professional or citizen in all kinds of social domains. These are domains such as education, health care, urban and regional politics and development, organizations, arts and leisure. Inherently, those practices are meant to improve participatory democracy and social justice on the personal, local and global levels. Principal (scientific) and participant researchers, educators and learners, consultants and clients maintain subject relations.

So basically, those practices as processes of transaction have to meet the standards of direct democratic participation and critical reflection. Ideally, their results have to meet the standards of improving participatory democracy, empowerment and social justice. Participatory research practices have "ethics first" as their motto.

Registration

Registration for the congress is now open.

Provisional programme

Participatory Action Research – 22 August, 2006

With amongst others Peter Reason, Verkerk and key workshops by Coenen and Wadsworth

Action Learning/Developing Countries – 23 August, 2006

With amongst others Inge Hutter and Jacques Zeelen

Process Management – 24 August, 2006

With amongst others Schruijer, Schoemaker

And furthermore

Øyvind Pålshaugen

Program streams

Education

Care & Social Work

Engineering, Economics & Management

Arts & Culture

Developing countries

The latest programme information is available on:

<http://www.oprit.rug.nl/boog01/>

<http://www.alarpm.org.au/>

At last! A generalist postgraduate university course in action research

We are delighted to announce the commencement of a Graduate Certificate of Social Science in Action Research. This will be an exciting workplace, community and practice-based course, using adult learning principles. Its 'home base' will be at the Prahran campus of Swinburne University. It will commence from February (semester one) 2006.

The course will be Australia's first generic postgraduate course in action research, providing valuable resourcing to practice-based inquiry in a wide range of specialist settings including health and human services, agriculture, community, education, human-technology design, business and management, environment, and international development.

Members of SPIRAL have been actively involved in supporting and advising on the development of course content and accreditation materials in 2004, which successfully completed the formal accreditation processes of the University on 18 April 2005. SPIRAL members as well as other key people using research to create desirable change on an ongoing basis are also anticipated to be among the pioneer course members. An innovative feature will be course members contributing guest lectures that draw on their own unique expertise to illuminate aspects of the course.

It will run part-time (two subjects per semester in the evenings, with some one day blocks) over the course of the year. We hope to attract an enrolment of 20-30 experienced participants who are playing key roles in a range of sectors such as the community and government and non-government organisations, and who will form together an inspirational community of practice and learning.

We are currently developing more detailed course publicity materials (and information session dates), which we will be able to distribute very soon. Two flyers in particular are – one for

intending Course Members (*'Something to look forward to'*) – and one for Organisations (*'What would you pay for all these resources?'*) that might sponsor or support their staff or community members to participate. If you would like either or both of these publicity materials, please email actionresearch@swin.edu.au We hope we can rely on your support to publicise the course widely amongst your networks. Your contributions will be a critical factor in the success of the course.

Thank you again for the dedication, time and commitment that some SPIRAL members have contributed to making the commencement of the course a tangible reality - at last!

We will be in touch again soon,

Yours sincerely, Liz and Yoland

Adj Prof. Yoland Wadsworth
Course and Program Convenor
&
Dr. Elizabeth Branigan
Course Consultant

Action Research Program
Institute for Social Research P11
Prahran Campus, Swinburne University
www.sisr.net/arp

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.

Guidelines for Contributors

Contributions to the *ALAR 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.

Contributions to the Action Research Case Study (ARCS) Monograph Series

Contributions are welcomed to the Action Research Case Study (ARCS) monograph series. The case studies in this refereed series contribute to 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 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.

Membership Information and Subscription Forms

ALARPM individual membership

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 (2 issues per year).

ALARPM membership also provides information on 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 below.

ALARPM organisational membership

ALARPM is also keen to make the connections between people and activities in all the strands, streams and variants associated with our paradigm – including action learning, action research, process management, collaborative inquiry facilitation, systems thinking, organisational learning and development, for example, and with people who are working in any kind of organisational, community, workplace or other practice setting; and at all levels.

To this end we now have the capacity to invite organisational memberships – as Affiliates or Associates of ALARPM. We are currently trialling this new form of membership with some innovative ideas which we hope your organisation will find attractive.

Affiliate and associate organisations

Affiliate and Associate organisations pay the same modest membership subscription as an individual member and for that they will receive:

- The voting rights of a single member; Member discounts for one person (probably a hard-working office-bearer);
- One hard copy of the journal and the directory (which can be circulated and read by all members, office holders and people attending meetings);
- The right to a link from the ALARPM website <<http://www.alarpm.org.au>> to your website if you have one. Our new website will be completed soon and your organisation may write its own descriptive paragraph to go with its link;
- Occasional emails from ALARPM about events or activities or resources that you may like to send on to your whole membership.
- Members of organisations who become ALARPM Affiliates or Associates may also chose to become an individual member of ALARPM for 40% the normal cost (so they can still belong to other more local and specialist professional organisations also...). We believe this provides an attractive cost and labour free benefit that your organisation can offer to its own members;
- And, if 10 or more of your members join ALARPM, your own organisational membership will be waived;
- Members of ALARPM Affiliates or Associates who join ALARPM individually will receive full individual membership and voting rights, world congress and annual conference discounts (all they need to do is name the ALARPM Affiliate or Associate organisation/network on their membership form).

Please note: members of ALARPM Affiliates or Associates who become discount individual ALARPM members receive an e-version of the journal and membership directory rather than a hard copy.

ALAR Journal subscription

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

For more information about ALARPM and its activities please contact us on:

ALARPM Association Inc
PO Box 1748
Toowong Qld 4066
Australia

Email: membership@alarpm.org.au
Phone: 61-7-3875-6869 (Margaret Fletcher)
Fax: 61-7-3342-1669

INDIVIDUAL MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION FORM

I wish to apply for membership of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association Inc.

Personal Details

<i>Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss/Dr</i>		
<i>given names (underline preferred name)</i>		<i>family name</i>
<i>Home address</i>		
<i>Postcode</i>		
<i>Town / City</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Nation</i>
<i>Home contact numbers</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Fax</i>
<i>Email</i>		<i>Mobile</i>

Please send mail to: *Home* *Work*

Current Employment

<i>Position / Job Title</i>		<i>Organisation</i>	
<i>Address</i>			
<i>Postcode</i>			
<i>Town / City</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Nation</i>	
<i>Work contact numbers</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Fax</i>	
<i>Email</i>		<i>Mobile</i>	

My interests/projects relating to action learning, action research and process management are:

<input type="checkbox"/> Action Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Manager & Leadership Dev
<input type="checkbox"/> Action Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Methodology/Methods
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Action/Dev	<input type="checkbox"/> Org Change & Dev
<input type="checkbox"/> Education/Schools	<input type="checkbox"/> PAR
<input type="checkbox"/> Environment/Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/> Process Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Quality Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitation of AR, AL, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rural/Agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender Issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Justice/Social Change
<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Systems Approaches
<input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Development
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Services (Health)	<input type="checkbox"/> Team Learning & Dev
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational Education/HR
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<hr/> <i>Please specify</i>	

Do you wish to be linked with a world network of people with similar interests and have your information included in our database and appear in our annual networking directory?

Yes *No*

Please complete payment details overleaf ▶▶▶▶▶▶

To apply for ALARPM individual 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 as well.

Payment Details

Category of subscription (all rates include GST)

Mailing address within Australia

- \$93.50 AUD Full membership for people with mailing address *within* Aus

Mailing Address outside Australia

- \$104.50 AUD Full membership for people with mailing address *outside* Aus

Concessional membership within or outside Australia

- \$49.50 AUD Concessional membership for people with a mailing address within or outside Australia. The concessional membership is intended to assist people, who for financial reasons, would be unable to afford the full rate (eg. full-time students, unwaged and underemployed people).

Method of payment: Cheque/Bank Draft Money Order
 Visa/Bankcard/Mastercard (*please circle card type*)

Card No:

Cardholder's Name:

Cardholder's Signature: _____ Expiry Date: / /

Cheques, bank drafts or money orders can be made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. in Australian dollars. Please return application with payment details to:

ALARPM ASSOCIATION INC.
PO Box 1748, Toowong Qld 4066, Australia
Phone: (61-7) 3875 6869 (Margaret Fletcher, Secretary)
Fax: (61-7) 3342 1669
Email: membership@alarpm.org.au

ORGANISATIONAL MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION FORM

We wish to apply for membership of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association Inc.

- As an Affiliate Organisation (with primary purposes being action research, action learning, systems methodologies or a related methodology)
- As an Associate Organisation (with primary purposes that are not specifically one of these methodologies)

Organisational Details

<i>Organisation name</i>		<i>If incorporated</i>
<i>Contact address</i>		
<i>Postcode</i>		
<i>Town / City</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Nation</i>
<i>A/H contact numbers</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Fax</i>
<i>Email</i>		<i>Mobile</i>

Contact person/Please send mail attention to _____

Nature of Organisation

Please say if your organisation is an Association, Society, Group, Network, Collective, Informal/Community, Set, Department, Business, Institute, Centre, Library or other configuration.		
How many members (approximately) does your organisation have?		Do you know how many are ALARPM members? Is so how many?

What are your organisation's interests/projects relating to action learning, action research and process management?

Your organisation's focus is:

<input type="checkbox"/> Action Learning <input type="checkbox"/> Action Research <input type="checkbox"/> Community Action/Dev <input type="checkbox"/> Education/Schools <input type="checkbox"/> Environment/Sustainability <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitation of AR, AL, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Issues <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education <input type="checkbox"/> Human Services (Health) <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Organisations <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Manager & Leadership Dev <input type="checkbox"/> Methodology/Methods <input type="checkbox"/> Org Change & Dev <input type="checkbox"/> PAR <input type="checkbox"/> Process Management <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Management <input type="checkbox"/> Rural/Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> Social Justice/Social Change <input type="checkbox"/> Systems Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Development <input type="checkbox"/> Team Learning & Dev <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational Education/HR
_____ <i>Please specify</i>	

Do you wish to be linked with a world network of people with similar interests and have your information included in our database and appear in our annual networking directory?

- Yes No

Please complete payment details overleaf ▶▶▶▶▶▶

To apply for ALARPM organisational membership, which includes ALAR Journal subscription (2 issues per year), please complete the information requested overleaf and the payment details below. You do not need to complete the ALAR Journal subscription form as well.

Please note that the cost of organisational membership (affiliate and associate) is the same as for individual full membership. There is no concessional membership fee, but if an organisation has 10 or more individual members of ALARPM (or 10 or more who would like to be electronic -only members) then organisational membership is free.

Payment Details

Category of subscription (all rates include GST)

Mailing address within Australia

\$93.50 AUD Full membership for organisations with mailing address *within* Aus

Mailing Address outside Australia

\$104.50 AUD Full membership for organisations with mailing address *outside* Aus

Method of payment:

Cheque/Bank Draft

Money Order

Visa/Bankcard/Mastercard (*please circle card type*)

Card No:

Cardholder's Name:

Cardholder's Signature: _____ Expiry Date: / /

Cheques, bank drafts or money orders must in Australian dollars and made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. Please return completed application with payment details to:

ALARPM ASSOCIATION INC.

PO Box 1748, Toowong Qld 4066, Australia

Phone: (61-7) 3875 6869 (Margaret Fletcher, Secretary)

Fax: (61-7) 3342 1669

Email: membership@alarpm.org.au

ALAR JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Address Details

<i>Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss/Dr</i>		
<small>Contact Name</small>	<small>given names</small>	<small>family name</small>
<i>Organisation</i>		
<i>Address</i>		
		<i>Postcode</i>
<i>Town / City</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Nation</i>
<i>Contact numbers</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Fax</i>
<i>Email</i>		

Payment Details

ALAR Journal subscription (2 issues per year) does not include ALARPM membership entitlements (all rates include GST).

ALAR Journal Subscription rate for private individuals

- \$ 71.50 AUD for individuals with a mailing address *within* Aus
- \$ 82.50 AUD for individuals with a mailing address *outside* Aus

ALAR Journal Subscription rate for libraries and tertiary institutions

- \$ 93.50 AUD for institutions with a mailing address *within* Aus
- \$104.50 AUD for institutions with a mailing address *outside* Aus

Method of payment: Cheque/Bank Draft Money Order
 Visa/Bankcard/Mastercard (*please circle card type*)

Card No:

Cardholder's Name:

Cardholder's Signature: _____ Expiry Date: / /

Cheques, bank drafts or money orders can be made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. in Australian dollars. Please return completed application with payment details to:

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