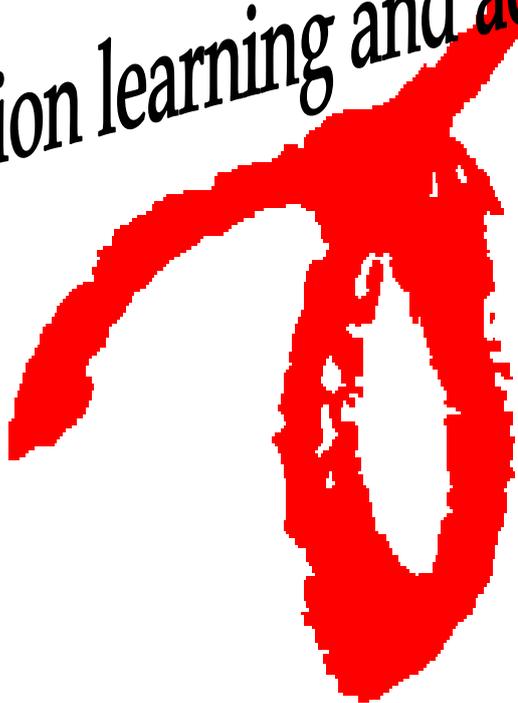


# ALAR

Action learning and action research journal



Volume 15 No 2 October 2009

**ALAR Journal Vol 15 No 2 October 2009**

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*ALARA'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.*

# **ALAR Journal**

**Vol 15 No 2 October 2009**

***ALAR Journal* is jointly published by the Action Learning, Action Research Association (ALARA) Inc, Interchange and Prosperity Press**

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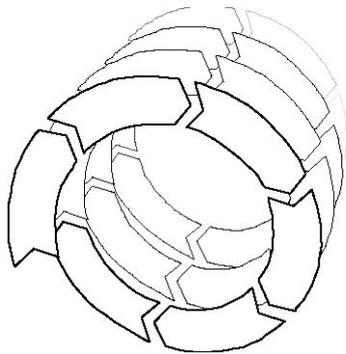
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**ALAR Journal**  
**Volume 15 No 2**  
**October 2009**  
**ISSN 1326-964X**

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# Editorial

Summertime is just around the corner, heralding the harshness of the season for many; change is upon us once more.

So too, this October edition of *ALARj*: tensions, connections and observations in action research bind the articles. Autoethnographic challenges faced by action researchers, educator-as-researcher-as-learner and dialectical inquiries into practice, all name various aspects of the action research field and the current state of play in our institutions and organisations, in particular our education institutions.

In addition, the two book reviews herald new ways of being and doing in action research. McIntyre's (2006) trust in participatory action research is gutsy, according to Susan Goff, in her review of *Systemic Governance and Accountability: Working and Reworking the Conceptual and Spatial Boundaries* and Robert Sanders uncovers new ways to engage his learners through new media practices, with his review of *Action Research and New Media* by Hearn, Tacchi, Foth & Lennie, (2009).

The 2009 ALARA national conference held in Melbourne in September considered the ways and means by which we might live differently and action research our way through the ecological and economic meltdown. If you wish to submit your conference presentation, catalyst paper or creative work for the April 2010 edition of *ALARj*, please do so by 4<sup>th</sup> December. The conference theme will lead well into

the 2010 World Congress where themes and conversations are sure to heat up.

We are in for another long, hot summer in the southern hemisphere, and the action research flames are indeed being fanned.

Margaret O'Connell  
Managing Editor, *ALARj*

# Tensions in action research

Kim Polistina and Sevasti-Melissa Nolas

The following article explores personal and professional tensions experienced by researchers during the performance of action research (AR). These include tensions between the worlds of the academe and action research contexts, difficulties with maintaining a sense of self-identity and worth, problems with giving voice to a diversity of worldviews through reliance and inappropriate and inadequate research methods and struggling with establishing a dialogue that may enable empowerment. Reflecting on our early action research experience we note that much writing on action research does not correspond with experiences in the field - the research 'field' is far more messy and unpredictable. By discussing our research tensions we wish to draw attention to possible gaps in researcher training and guidance and areas that may prevent action research from being the more emancipatory versions we had all envisaged.

## Introduction

This paper explores personal and professional tensions experienced by researchers during the performance of action research (AR). Tensions that arise through research and related group processes are the subject of much methodological writing. However, the personal and professional tensions faced by the researcher in implementing action research are less discussed. We write as researchers engaging with action research in two different research contexts and argue that there is still some way to go in developing a discourse that can explore and eventually better support action researchers on both a personal and professional level through their action research projects.

Action research is diverse in its origins, intentions and applications. A common point of reference for action

researchers, however, is the desire to create a more socially responsive social science, to actively engage with the world-at-large and to help bring about constructive change in diverse settings (Argyris & Schon 1991, Fals-Borda 1997, Freire 1997, Kemmis 1998, Kemmis & McTaggart 1997, Kolb 1976, Kolb, Rubin & Osland 1991, Lewin 1946, 1952, Reason & Bradbury 2001, Trist & Murray 1990). While action research is diverse, the authors of this paper share this common point of reference.

We work at the critical theorist end of the methodological spectrum, engaging with marginalised groups and utilising forms of action research that evoke varying degrees of emancipatory or empowerment aims (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). As researchers, we see emancipatory action research (EAR) as a way of providing non-alienating communication and interaction that allows for what Habermas has termed basic human interest of rational autonomy and freedom<sup>1</sup> to occur (Carr & Kemmis 1997). These are the critical criteria for research projects that aim to create social and cultural change for those experiencing various forms of oppression. In such research projects, researchers are supposed to be catalysts for and of change processes by recognising their role as rhetoricians (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000) and using that role in order to facilitate, promote and support change.

In our different experiences, we found that the emancipatory goals of action research were more elusive than we had expected from our summations of the literature (see Nolas 2009, Nolas 2007, Polistina 2005). The hopes we gathered from the action research literature, and our reasons for choosing such an approach in the first place, were far

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<sup>1</sup> To achieve rational autonomy and freedom critical social science examines the personal and social, subjective and objective content of the information provided and pursues the recognition and elimination of alienating conditions on communication and social/cultural actions (Carr & Kemmis 1997).

removed from the tensions that we experienced in attempting to implement such principles in practice. This paper is about the tensions that prevented our research from being the more emancipatory versions we had envisaged. In this respect the paper builds on recent discussions on similar personal conflicts with implementation of action research (Bloemhard 2006). The paper begins with an overview of the two research contexts before moving into an examination of the tensions experienced in doing action research by the authors.

### **Moving between worlds - the research contexts**

The first research context is from Polistina's grounded theory/action research project on outdoor learning. Researching outdoor learning and outdoor lifestyles with 40 odd non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians required a methodological approach that could easily take a back seat to their everyday worlds. As a researcher this also presented Polistina with the challenge of becoming part of a multitude of individual everyday worlds and became a prerequisite to providing authentic and accurate depictions of these worlds necessitating the choice of a dual methodology. Grounded theory and action research became the catalyst for meeting this challenge. The author placed herself as a 'researcher as participant' and 'sense maker' (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick 1998) - building interpersonal relationships that would assist with narration of other people's stories through the research. The diversity of relationships arising from these complex social and cultural interactions presented what at times felt like insurmountable tensions. These tensions were in part managed through the relationships that developed through the research. The researcher found herself involved in the lives of her research participants and, as such felt responsible for their well-being. In each of the relationships her role as researcher, in many instances, took second place to her role as a person in the everyday worlds

of the people involved in the research. The multiple roles arising gave way to significant transformational learning moments for Polistina in the discursive process promoted through what Wasserman (2005) identifies as transformative dialogic moments. These are communicative moments that shift the individual cognitive perspective to a relational arena and allow the researcher to gain a deeply embedded understanding of the identities of those involved in their research and others round them. This process however, is arduous and proved in some instances to be stressful, upsetting and frustrating taking its toll on the health and well-being of the researcher herself - an outcome not examined in the initial training to be an action researcher.

Nolas' evaluation of an activity-based, youth inclusion programme in deprived neighbourhoods in England (Humphreys, Nolas & Olmos 2006) provides the second research context. The evaluation used a participatory video methodology (for further details on the methodology see Ramella & Olmos 2005). In doing so the research was embedded in a youth inclusion programme delivered by providing young people with a cultural activity through which they could express and communicate their views and experiences of the programme. The young people used the video cameras to interview their friends and fellow project participants. The researchers then supported the groups with editing their footage into a 15-minute documentary about life in their neighbourhoods and their experiences of the programme. The participatory video project was conceived with two aims. First, the video methodology provided a way of engaging with young people in order to document their views of the programme and evaluate programme strengths and weaknesses from the young people's point of view. At the same time, the methodology, drawing on participatory action research (PAR) and critical pedagogy, supported the emancipatory aims of raising critical consciousness (Freire

1970). The latter aim was also coherent with the social inclusion programme aims and objectives.

Although the action research contexts had different research aims the researchers' experiences were similar in the sense that both encountered a range of tensions arising from the relationships and interactions they found. One central tension that both researchers experienced was the ethical and personal conflict of being the conduit between the worlds (Lykes & Blanche 2003) of the wider mainstream research community, the research context and the everyday lives of those involved in the action research. The aptitude for living across these worlds was the key feature in successfully (or otherwise) bridging the gaps (Karttunen 1994, p. xii). This following section therefore discusses the main tensions that arose for the researchers in implementing action research in these worlds and through their respective research projects.

### **Moving between worlds – researcher's tensions in action research**

The tensions emanate from conflicts between the researchers' initial expectations of the benefits of undertaking action research and their subsequent lived experiences throughout their research project. The following three overarching tensions form the basis of the main discussion in this paper. The first relates specifically to institutional support and guidance, the second to pluralism in action research and the third to the emancipatory claims of action research.

- 1. Support and guidance through researcher's professional development and personal growth:** As new action researchers, tensions arose as we explored our assumptions that action research provides a forum for all involved in the research to be themselves, to know, value and be able to express their own identity (Whyte 1943)

and our realisation that this assumption would often not be supported in lived experience as researchers.

2. **Plurality of methods and worldviews:** Action research is often applied in the service of diverse and varied worldviews (Roberts 1999) and uses a plurality of methods. As such, it is described as a method for providing an on-going and supportive platform for these worldviews during and post-research setting. We often encountered resistance to such pluralism and the reconstruction of research methodology through the action research process (McTaggart 1991). We therefore found ourselves in a position where the diversity of our information collection styles was not being valued in our everyday institutional worlds as they were in our brief encounters with colleagues met in the action research community.
3. **Dialogue for empowerment:** Whilst action research provides a platform for initiating 'dialogue' with marginalised groups (Freire 1997) dialogue is not always the smooth and seamless process that leads to empowerment. The recognition that empowerment is situated in the everyday social and cultural contexts that perpetuate oppressive social processes, come with a recognition of the absence of skills and experience to deal with such situations in a constructive manner.

An underlying assumption throughout our discussion is a growing concern about the difficulty of the lived experience of researchers working in action research of which there appears to be little literary or institutional guidance for coping with these tensions (Karttunen 1994, Lather 1991, Roberts 1999). A difficulty exacerbated when initiating action research for the purpose of social change or emancipatory ends. These concerns highlight areas where, as a community of action researchers, we could seek to expand the support and guidance available beyond the

functional advice on how action research ought to be conducted. These include support and guidance for coping with emotional, social, cultural and interpersonal conflicts found in action research.

*Tension 1 – Support and guidance through researcher's professional development and personal growth*

Whyte (1943) identifies the opportunity in action research to provide a forum for the researcher to become more aware of their own identity, value and self-concept. In this premise we found many tensions. Although we found a sense of personal and professional identity in our research contexts, we often found it difficult to maintain these identities in our academic institutions.

Working primarily in what are still 'closed book institutions' (Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett 2001), with different levels of support for social change methodologies, the reality slowly emerged for the authors of our own "illusions for a better world" (Fals-Borda 1997). Maton (2000) notes that an important means to challenging conventional values and norms is by linking with alternative community settings and groups advocating counter social paradigms to the mainstream culture. This is a very tall order for a newly initiated researcher striving to succeed in this mainstream culture. Very few are able to jeopardise their own personal (and family) security and life stability to become activist social scientists who will sustain different or alternative values, practices and lifestyles to that of the mainstream. While motivating and inspiring, replication of Fals-Borda's journey out from his institutional ivory tower to that of political activist would prove too difficult to achieve for the majority who advocate social change, including many action researchers. As a minority research discipline in our individual institutions or departments the valuable support found from a limited number of sympathetic and like-

minded colleagues was quickly subjugated by those whose interests served the status quo. We found ourselves tied to the very social system that we sought change for our own everyday existence.

Likewise the identities we were required to uphold in the academic institutions often clashed with the identities developed in the research context. As Van Maanen, Manning and Miller identify, fieldwork raises serious and certainly heartfelt questions about one's competence and self-identity, the worth of one's work, the moral responsibilities associated with the short- and long-term relations one develops with others in the field, the possible consequences - or lack thereof - of one's work, and so on (and on) (cited in Kleinman & Copp 1993).

In the research with English teenagers, Nolas found that creating relationships was not necessarily the same as 'empowerment'. Engaging in banter, which might be one way of initiating relationships, posed an ethical dilemma. For instance banter with sexist undertones in the research setting conflicted with her identity and feminist values. The result, at least initially was being stunned into inactivity - the pace of the banter being too quick to respond in a way that problematised the content of the banter. Nolas highlights the very situation that Khanlou and Peter (2005) raise, "PAR is centred upon challenging the status quo, community participants can be left more vulnerable, marginalised, and exposed in some hostile environments" (p. 2337). If Nolas challenged this sexist banter would she still be able to work with the group? How could she respond to this banter in a way that continued the relationships but also challenged what was being said? The result is the researcher being stunned into inactivity and a personal struggle begins when trying to comprehend how to deal with a situation in a way that expresses one's identity,

without imposing one's identity on others. In this situation the knowledge of what is occurring is "both liberating and paralysing" (Lather 1995). To the newly initiated action researcher this can have devastating effects on their confidence and ability to assert oneself in latter situations in the action research process.

Similarly the research with mothers on outdoor learning and outdoor lifestyles had its own level of silencing of identities and disrespect for other's knowledge. Riding her bike towards the University like the muscles that carry her, Polistina became weary. Weary in the knowledge that disclosing to colleagues she has been listening to a mother of three children and an Indigenous woman speak of how they share their wealth of pro-environmental knowledge and values with their families and others will receive the usual look of disinterest, superiority, condescension and disbelief in the waste of valuable research time and resources on what they perceive to be a pointless research project. The identities of the women interviewed and the female researcher's own professional identity and personal identity as a woman, who also shares pro-environmental behaviours with others, are discredited and devalued. As much as all three women are entangled with the dominant ready made cultural discourse they are, as Lather (1995) notes, all too aware of the inadequacy of this available language for "it is what is despised and forgotten that is the bearer of hope, not the socially sanctioned" (p. 51). Such non-formal outdoor learning in community-based and Indigenous cultural contexts is devalued and dismissed as unimportant and inadequate by the dominant social educational system (Clover 1996, Kidd 1997, Rose 1997, Rowland & Volet 1996).

If we define identity as being at one with oneself whilst simultaneously feeling a sense of affinity and belonging with a community (Dillon, Kelsey & Duque-Aristizabal 1999) then

we see that the action researcher is at once embroiled in tensions of identity crisis. Whilst we can feel a sense of belonging with our communities in our research contexts we often could not feel an equal sense of belonging with the research community in our respective institutions. Whyte (1943) notes that unless the fieldworker can carry with him/her a reasonably consistent picture of himself/herself, he/she is likely to run into difficulties.

Being a member of a global action research community provides opportunities for support. But on a daily basis being a lone action researcher or research team can be a lonely experience. Sankaran (2006) comments on the varying levels of communication between action researchers identifying that some countries exhibiting more frequent conversations than others. It is the lack of conversations amongst action researchers and in particular newer members of the action research community that is a concern for both Sankaran and the authors of this paper<sup>2</sup>. It is this continual and supportive conversational element that is necessary to alleviate some of the interpersonal and often highly emotional apprehensions that exist for action researchers.

In short, training and support for action researchers (particularly new researchers) in dealing with the interpersonal and emotional ties of one to one relationships, group dynamics and conflicts in their day to day multiple identities is required. The same support needs to be afforded to action researchers that they work so hard to provide to the marginalised groups with whom they work.

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<sup>2</sup> This concern has started to be dealt with in the recent survey of members by ALAR executive.

## *Tension 2 – Plurality of methods and worldviews*

Communication, collaboration and engagement with social movements at the local and/or individual level, has been put forward as a way of countering postmodernist criticisms of the emancipatory aims of action research (Fisher 2003, Kemmis 1996). Part of this collaboration is the continual reconstruction of research methodologies as part of the action research process (McTaggart 1991) to correspond to the needs and characteristics of the local group. To not recognise the inevitability of this is to engage in cultural imperialism (McTaggart 1991, 1997).

This subsequent cognitive dissonance is highlighted by Bloemhard (2006) who provides a perceptive account of her experience of adapting her research process away from action research to a social constructivist approach. Yet there is a sense of failure in her story, which is not reflective of the philosophy of action research. “It was with great regret, that I had to abandon the action research focus in favour of a methodology that would allow an exploration of spiritual care ...” (p. 8). Her regret was a result of the restrictions of a methodology meant to provide flexibility of research design. If we are to support definitive action research explanations then Bloemhard indeed portrayed the essence of a true action researcher in her ability to allow, the research methodology and methods themselves to be reinterpreted and reconstituted by the inherent characteristics of her participants.

Implementation, construction, reconstruction and continuing re-reconstruction of research methodology as an ongoing process may also not reflect the rigidity of many institutional processes. It may also not reflect the cultural imperialism that pervades many research institutions processes for quality in research established by gatekeepers for the status quo. If available, the action research supervisors are equally

constrained in this regard and discussions that challenge these constraints can often highlight the problem without offering alternative ways forward.

Often the result is the action research following institutional or external funding body or stakeholder guidelines (Alasuutari 1995) rather than reconstructive research practices. For Polistina, this arose in the use of non-written research information provided by those in the research, the analysis of data in the form of pictures, theatre, song, wood craft and observed lifestyle practices were often reduced and recorded in written form even though this reporting method was not authentic to the research context. Debates with institutional gatekeepers quickly identified that documents were required to be written and other forms of research evidence were not acceptable outside of disciplines specifically related to that form of discourse for example paintings are acceptable in Creative Arts Research Projects but not outside of the designated academic discipline. Any alternative cultural discourse such as that found in Indigenous Australian research is instantly made inferior to the dominant research paradigm.

The cognitive dissonance for the researchers fitting in with the dominant scientific field whilst simultaneously attempting to give voice to other ways of knowing and investigating this knowledge is perturbing. Many of the methods that could be utilised for this purpose are often devalued in traditional Western science. Although specific procedural guidance may exist on implementing flexible methodologies; these guidelines are limited in their ability to prepare action researchers for the difficulties of juggling a diversity of epistemological positions in one research project for example oral, written, visual, sensory and sometimes even spiritual ways of knowing and investigating a research topic. Furthermore the information gathered from one

method may be rich when in isolation but problematic when merged with other methods, a dichotomy that resembles the rich tapestry that is social and culture life and requiring researcher training that provides tools for dealing with such complexities.

Dick (2001) emphasises that it is difficult for researchers not located in the research setting to maintain relationships and achieve participation with the people engaged in the lived experience of that setting. In action research we attempt to situate our witnesses as translators with the action researcher as co-translator or conduit that moves from one world (our research group/community) to another (our dominant social system). Lather (1995) argues that this process of co-translation can be

[b]oth validating the absolute necessity of speaking and radically invalidating all parameters of reference, the task is doubled: breaking silence and simultaneously shattering any given discourse (p. 49).

Polistina's skill of translating her methodology into everyday language and conversely translating everyday events into research language allowed her to create and sustain her relationships with both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. Similarly, Nolas' skill in negotiating several languages within the lives of the youths provided important insights into the multi-faceted nature of their daily life and coping mechanisms. It is these transliterator skills that are difficult to acquire in academic training and need further attention in the action research training forums.

The struggle for voice and affirmation of self-identity was exacerbated by often unsuccessful attempts to implement the notion that action research provides voice to the diverse worldviews of our research participants (Roberts 1999). Providing audibility to the diversity of voices in our research

reports is reliant on our ability as researcher to unify research values with the relevant local or social values of the groups with whom we interact. Values are expressed in the media, discourse and texts chosen by these groups.

Outside the physical interconnection through, for example, the human senses of sight, sound, touch, smell and speech, media and discourse utilised in human interactions in its widest sense is seen to be a diverse phenomenon including interconnections between people through sculpture, photographs, motion pictures, maps, graffiti, music and murals (Finnegan 2002). Finnegan proposes that rather than attempt to capture the many ways of interconnecting between humans into a single unilinear list, that we instead draw on the multi-nature of human interconnectedness and work towards becoming sensitised to the different contexts in which they occur. This allows research to be sympathetic to the viewpoint that for a project to be emancipatory it must take into consideration current communication technologies, for example dominant media, and their potency in shaping human experience, and the complexity and multiple-sited constructedness of our individual selves and our worlds (Lather 1991). Fenwick (2000) further suggests that relations of power and knowledge saturate human cognition, so

we must, from a critical cultural perspective, analyse the structures of dominance that express or govern the social relationships and competing forms of communication and cultural practices within that system (p. 256).

Nolas found herself entering a trading system with both gatekeepers (the youth workers) and participants (the teenagers): the teenagers agreed to work with the evaluation and in return they would receive a DVD output of their work. Meanwhile the youth workers allowed her access to the young people in exchange for the DVD which they could

use as an output measure and demonstration of their work when seeking funding. Nolas, as action researcher, needed to possess, beyond her researching skills, the skills of negotiating such trade-offs without compromising the ethos of the research. These daily negotiations, manipulations, deals and interactions are often absent for action research reports even though they constitute the plurality of 'methods' used to engage with the field.

The translation of research data value into more local value became the production of the community project DVD output. Nolas' dilemma began with the reporting of this local discourse for the research outputs. These audiovisual stories would still need to be analysed and picked apart in order to become valid and accepted as 'research'. They could not stand alone for what they were: audiovisual stories. They had to be the representation of something else, an underlying reality that the researcher would access through analysis. The inability to utilise the creative forms of research reporting and the need to translate them into the dominant cultural discourse is of course contradictory to the emancipatory aims of the research project. In the end Nolas and colleagues decided on an 'and-and' strategy. We analysed the audiovisual stories *and* we created an audiovisual report (Humphreys, Nolas, and Olmos 2005), that way young people, through their compositions were able to communicate directly with the funders.

Likewise, Polistina was able to effectively argue for the inclusion of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in Western outdoor learning and educational contexts (Polistina 1999, Polistina 2001) as previously state she was frustrated by the conflict between the written discourse required for Western scientific research reporting and the lack of ability to utilise reporting evidence more authentic to the Indigenous culture to which the traditional ecological

knowledge belonged, for example oral translation, spiritual experiences or art. This tension is described as knowledge that is 'unwritable' by Lather (1995). Although giving voice to diverse worldviews is a goal of action research, some areas of dominant academia are yet to develop a structure that would support researchers who seek to provide evidence through other forms of learning or knowledge (Wane 2002).

The tensions of conducting action research into educational processes with other cultures (Indigenous Australians) come from the post-modern cultural criticisms challenging a number of central premises of modernist education. These include the advocacy of science, technology and rationality as the foundation for equating change with progress (O'Sullivan 2001). Tuhiwai-Smith (1997) supports this critique of the mono-intellectual basis of Western science when developing research methodologies specific to Indigenous peoples. Likewise, Gardner's (2006) work on multiple intelligences speaks to the debilitating effect a bias on logical/mathematical intelligence in Western education systems has on other forms of human intelligences<sup>3</sup>, although guidelines and examples existed for implementation proved problematic.

During the outdoor lifestyles research an Indigenous man responded to the question "what does the environment mean to you?": "If you want to know how I feel about the land stand by yourself at [name of location] and you will feel it yourself". In response to the same question an Aboriginal woman advises me to go and see a specific theatre production as it explains the depth of emotion she is trying to explain. I go the location by myself and feel the enormity of the environment around me, I go to see the theatre production and find myself crying through most of it. Are these the responses and experiences I am now to attempt to explain in my black and white,

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<sup>3</sup> Other intelligences are: linguistic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal/intrapersonal, naturalistic and existential (Gardner 2006).

clean, non-emotional thesis write-up? There is no ability to transfer this new knowledge I have felt and experienced through the suddenly dwindling power of the pen, nor do I feel compelled to do so. This worldview and traditional ecological knowledge cannot be catered for in the Western scientific model and yet I try again - it is 'required'! (Polistina, PhD research journal).

Grenier (1998) identifies, however, the lack of training available in the use of alternative research approaches. Although writings in some of the critical social sciences disciplines show some relief to this dearth of training and guidance (for example see Knowles & Cole 2002, Lipsett 2002, Tuhiwai-Smith (Ngati Awa Ngati Porou) 1999)<sup>4</sup>.

Some dialogue is also offered to alleviate this tension in cross-cultural action research projects with a focus, justifiably, on discussion and techniques to ensure a lack of exploitation of the non-dominant culture (McTaggart 1993, 1999, Polistina 2001), for example in the notion of cultural safety<sup>5</sup> in empowerment research (Pennel, Noponen & Weil 2005). This dialogue, when undertaken can often be research context specific and therefore relevant to a handful of academics interested in this context or fleetingly discussed in non-continual settings (conferences/workshops) that provide a glimmer of hope to researchers struggling for clarity but quickly fade once the event is finished. McMurray (2000) supports this cultural and sub-cultural specificity in action research identifying the difficulty international students found in applying the conceptual two-dimensional action research models that permeate the action research literature.

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<sup>4</sup> Although it should be noted here that the lack of recognition of the Indigenous origins of these forms of research evidence and information collection from Knowles and Cole (2002) and Lipsett (2002) speaks itself to the silencing of other ways of knowing until 'discovered' by Western science.

<sup>5</sup> Cultural safety refers to a context in which one can express and affirm one's own cultural beliefs and practices while extending oneself to understand and respect other worldviews. It is the necessary context for generating Indigenous and local knowledge (Pennel, Noponen & Weil 2005).

The necessity for action researchers to be aware, not unlike a form of human encyclopaedia, of personal, social and cultural theories and concepts, in order to bring about social change is not conducive to the reductionist stance of much of the historical Western scientific thought (Barker 2004, Neuman & Kreuger 2003, Yamamoto 1993). Knudtson and Suzuki (1992) state that “while [Western] science yields powerful insights into isolated fragments of the world, the sum total of these insights is a disconnected, inadequate description of the whole” (p. xxii).

Shilling (1999) argues that

a more developed view of the embodied agent and emotional dimension of interaction has the potential to provide a level of analysis which mediates, and allows for the continued saliency of, structure and action (p. 544).

Alternative discourse, for example, habits, senses and sensualities whilst cognitively grounding directed human (inter)action also mould and constrain social structures and action and are simultaneously partially shaped by them (p. 545). A deeper and more comprehensive focus in researcher training on behaviours, actions and research information collection instruments that assist in achieving this deeper understanding and awareness in our research projects would benefit researchers in Western scientific communities.

Training in alternative research methods and methodologies that are able to give voice to a diversity of worldviews is often reliant on the resolve of the researcher, their supervisors and immediate research group (for example pockets of critical social researchers such as action researchers in institutions) rather than the academic infrastructure being implemented to establish training in alternative methodologies for all new researchers.

Indigenous research strategies and processes, for example, that provide ways of researching and privileging what Indigenous peoples know, believe and value are rarely included in research methodology curriculum (Tuhiwai-Smith (Ngati Awa Ngati Porou) 1999). Including researcher training in theories such as multiple intelligences (Gardner 2006) and/or cultural awareness training for aspect such as understanding diverse forms of spirituality would also assist their ability to work with alternative research methods and engage with other ways of knowing.

### *Tension 3 – Dialogue for empowerment*

Action research often involves researchers working collaboratively with groups of people in community and/or organisational settings with the aim of improving everyday life and creating better futures. In action research 'relationships' are often seen to play a pivotal role in shaping the engagement with the individuals, groups, communities and organisations taking part in the research. Oliver, Herasymowych and Senko (2003) identify that these relationships can be with our own ideas, assumptions and values, with other people, our job and our organisation or a combination of all of these at once. When improvements happen through action research they are often the result of unearthed local knowledge and ways of doing things discovered through the relationships built during the collaborative process (Bolitho & Hutchison 1998, Shields 1994). However, both authors found that relationship building in collaborative forms of research is often left up to personal flair and disposition.

We found it was often the translation of the everyday 'unsafe' events or local ways of behaving into a research language and discourse that reduced the strength of empowerment for our participants. For us events such as the defamation of a community's cherished alternative outdoor

lifestyle, a man's frustration at the lack of change in the wider social system and fear for his children's future, or a young teenage girl once again humiliated in public by a male authority figure – these are the difficult lived experiences, valued as life experiences in our marginalised worlds, yet often devalued as irrelevant or unimportant knowledge in our parallel institutional research settings (Polistina 2004, Sheridan 2000, Wagner & Hayes 2005).

Those working on environmental science research may only use the traditional ecological knowledge that is relevant to their specific scientific field rather than the holistic Indigenous approach that diverges from such reductionism as Walters (1997) notes “the language of theory only expresses a reality experienced by the oppressors” (p. 29). This oppressive language is so insidious in our culture that the underlying values of inequality and disrespect are difficult to explain clearly and accurately when confronted with the perpetrator and results subsequently in the inability to adequately implement empowerment and social change for both the research participants and the researcher. Nolas provides a pointed example.

Two of the guys leave the room and I'm left with Graham\* who's fiddling with the tripod, extending and folding the legs. As he does this he repeats 'bitch'. To the tripod, to me, to the air, I don't know. But by this point, I've had enough of the swearing, which together with the sexist and racist banter, has, by-and-large, been the lingua franca since we started.

'Do you know that that's actually really offensive?' I ask Graham who looks at me blankly. The group's youth worker walks into the room and Graham asks him, 'Is it offensive?'

'What?' asks the youth worker.

'Bitch', Graham responds.

'Yeah, it is very offensive', replies the youth worker but Graham sticks to his guns and insists it isn't.

The exchange goes on. The youth worker says the word's offensive because it refers to an animal and not a human. I try to explain that 'bitch' is offensive particular if used to refer to a woman. Its

'derogatory' I tell him, though I'm pretty sure he won't know what this means, so I add, 'when you say something bad about someone, look down on them, it's disrespectful'. He tries to repeat the word and stammers. I enunciate it syllable by syllable. Graham repeats it and gets it right. Then I add, in a deliberately patronising way 'there you've learnt something new today'. But my strategy doesn't make me feel any better and I'm fuming. I feel angry, confused and inadequate.

In the situation above, both researcher and the research participant are confronted with alienating behaviours; Nolas experiencing sexist discourse and Graham experiencing the possible embarrassment at being confronted about his behaviour in a social situation and identification of his lack of literacy. Whilst neither person intended to insult or be disrespectful the momentum in social circumstances and level of personal strength or ability to contend with the dynamics of the situation can combine to produce results where neither person feels that the interaction was beneficial and both feel inadequate and hence further isolated (see also Nolas 2009).

Dominant discourses facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said by whom, where, when and how (Parker 1992). This is particularly relevant when we examine the power of the action researcher, in their legitimised and embodied social role of 'scientist'. Regardless of attempts by the action researcher to suppress or reduce this legitimised power (Adler & Rodman 2006), our privileged position is effectively a symptom of the overall dominant cultures power over other forms of knowing and research and ultimately struggles ensue (Ellsworth 1989, Gerrard 1995, Vander Plaat, Samson & Raven 2001).

Such struggles place the newly initiated and possibly the experienced action researcher in a dilemma of personal values conflicting with dominant cultural values and the

suppression of alternative thought and value. Examination of the politics that influence hegemonic construction of social knowledge can give a better understanding of the interests at stake and the alternative ways of knowing that may be marginalised (Voelklein & Howarth 2005). This will only be of benefit if action researchers accumulate sufficient political or cultural knowledge and experience to deal with the conflicts that occur on a daily basis in social and cultural change settings.

Although cultural awareness and the appointment of cultural supervisors is invaluable when working on research with Australian Indigenous people this cultural education did little to prepare Polistina for the antagonisms, anger, manipulation of power by other white (male and female) researchers and conversely high levels of elation, feelings of intense relief and spiritual experiences she encountered throughout her research.

The last 36 hours has been intense, related, yet not related to my research. I visited my colleague yesterday for lunch. She introduced me to a friend who was staying, Mary, a female aboriginal elder, who was to attend a meeting with the Queensland Liquor Licensing Board (LLB) the next morning. She was hopeful - ever hopeful - that they would be able to assist her to designate her local community a 'dry community'<sup>6</sup> and as such they could concentrate on re-establishing their cultural traditions. Her urgency was evident in her passion for discussing the future of the youth in her community. I couldn't help but want to assist in some way. We discussed what she would say and how she did not fear the people she would see but feared what they had the power to do/not do. She had to make them understand how important her culture was and how this culture was a dry culture. We discussed traditional Indigenous family lineage and she shows me in a drawing the complexity of familial and tribal relationships that she must explain to the meeting tomorrow. It is daunting and I wonder if

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<sup>6</sup> A 'dry community' is one that has been declared by the Liquor commission as illegal to sell, house or consume alcohol. It is used extensively by Aboriginal elders and communities to prevent the negative effects of alcohol abuse such as violence, crime and suicide, in their communities. For an example of the continued social conflicts that result from this social process refer to Barker (2005).

they will understand this complex family and tribal connectivity when viewing it from their nucleus family histories - I doubt it. Suddenly Mary is in despair - she is losing faith that the meeting will be a success, she becomes upset with the difficulty of explaining her culture and in some way I know it is also because she knows there is a good possibility that they will just not want to know. Suddenly my creative mind kicks in - I'll build a 3 dimensional model of the familial and tribal complexity that shows the layers that Mary is trying to explain. We spend the rest of the afternoon and well into the night cutting, re-cutting, pasting, un-pasting and dashing out to late night stores for more supplies. The end result is a small but effective model - a spinning wheel on top of other wheels all of which provide one aspect of her cultural story and connecting past, present and future. We sit back and view the final model. Mary is close to tears - it is exactly what she needs to give her the confidence to speak to the meeting tomorrow with an authority that she always held but for many social and personal reasons was not confident about. I am close to tears - I still don't fully understand the complexity of Indigenous family and tribal connections but I don't need to - I only need to respect it enough to assist with giving it voice - suddenly my dwindling faith in the ability of my own research to bring about social change is bolstered. Realisation of the complexity of the degrees of connections within my life and research begin to emerge. I realise I haven't finished the chapter for tomorrow's meeting - its 10.30pm - 'I'll do some when I get home'.

I agree to go to the meeting with Mary tomorrow it is at 9.00am. In the meeting Mary uses the model; she discusses with the LLB representatives the need for the dry community status. I watch, I listen and I support her in my silence. The problem is not only the dry community status it is the people in surrounding communities who sell liquor illegally to those in dry communities at extortionist prices - those attempting to create better lives for their communities being used by those from the dominant culture who see an opportunity to exploit. The LLB response - This is not the LLB responsibility!!!! - selling outside a dry community (even a couple of feet outside) is not illegal. I feel myself go red as I become furious but I hold my tongue - I watch, I listen.

We leave the meeting and I have to go to work, we don't talk a lot about the meeting just a few comments of support; hope; solidarity - but we both know that there is a good possibility that the LLB will do little to resolve the problems. I drop Mary off and spend the rest of my day at work in a daze - I've just been a voyeur in a process of social change that seems insurmountable. My supervisor is away this week, I go into the staff room and greet others, make tea and listen to them discuss t-tests, regressions, scatter plots and the newly acquired funding for the upgrade of the sports hall - there is no place for me in

these discussions - I leave the staff room and go back to the isolation of my office cubical.

I'm angry at the realisation that the LLB will do very little to assist change; I'm upset for Mary and her diminishing yet ever optimistic hope for her community; I'm late with my chapter; I'm annoyed at how little I can do to help her; .... the electricity bill needs paying; Sports hall!!! what a waste of money when so many beneficial social change projects go unfunded and struggle for support; I'm confused - I enjoy drinking wine I don't enjoy the effect it has on some people and alcohol abuse, ... enough, enough, enough ... I'm exhausted (Polistina, PhD Research Journal).

A process of self-discovery and the development of a critically reflective mind are all encompassing, when paralleled with the action research process regardless of level of emancipatory interests, they become all consuming entities. These entities although liberating and enlightening can also be debilitating and soul destroying if adequate support is not available for the researcher and it is this tension we hope to relieve in some part with our discussions in this paper.

With all of the tensions discussed above and a myriad of compounding personal and social events, we found as we moved through our research projects that confidence in the ability of action research to provide an emancipatory platform for dialogue with marginalised groups waned. Whilst the flexibility and responsiveness of action research produced deeper understanding of complex social situations (Roberts 1999) we became less convinced that this understanding would effect social change. Whilst a perennial dilemma for all forms of qualitative research, particularly emancipatory and critical theorists' work, it is exacerbated for new action researchers seeking to make effective change in the social settings they research. The skills required to successfully create a dialogue for empowerment presents yet another area worthy of more attention in action research training and guidance.

## Concluding comments

In this paper the authors have explored three overarching tensions in implementing their respective research projects. These include tensions between the worlds of academe and action research contexts, difficulties with maintaining a sense of self-identity and worth, problems with giving voice to a diversity of worldviews through reliance and inappropriate and inadequate research methods and struggling with establishing a dialogue of enabling and empowerment through action research. Reflecting on our early action research experience we note that much writing on action research does not correspond with experiences in the field. The idealistic genre which is often employed in writing about action research is not a particularly useful resource for interacting with action research participants. The research 'field' is far more messy and unpredictable; more nuanced and more sensitive representation of action research in practice is likely to be useful in the long run to reduce the types of tensions in research implementation discussed in this paper.

By discussing these research tensions we do not strive to trivialise the situations of the marginalised groups with whom we work, we simply wish to draw attention to possible gaps in researcher training and guidance. If these training gaps are developed they have the potential to provide much needed support for action researchers wishing to bring about social change and become successful conduits, where necessary, to share information and knowledge across many cultural and social worlds.

This training must include competence in maintaining a sense of pride and identity in one's work when faced with adversity that can be experience in wider social institutions. Best intentions can often be ill-informed, misguided, embroiled in social politics and the support from our

colleagues and supervisors may not be enough to address the personal tensions that arise from these situations. We have attempted in this paper to contribute to the literature that provides personal examples of situations and events that action research and other forms of critical and emancipatory research may pitch at us from time to time. We also hope to have assisted in supporting others work through tensions they may be facing with the implementation of their action research projects.

### **Acknowledgement**

This paper originated from a presentation at the Communities and Change Workshop at the London School of Economics in June 2006. We would like to acknowledge Nick Gould's collaboration and contribution to that presentation and his role as a critical friend in the subsequent shaping of this paper. We trust he is enjoying a well-deserved retirement.

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# Connecting pre-service teachers to 'real world' teaching practices through microteaching

Donna Tangen and Amanda  
Mergler

Action research proved a useful strategy for monitoring the evolution of a microteaching task as an authentic assessment for post-graduate pre-service teachers. Through four iterations of continually reflecting on the structure, purpose and outcomes of utilising microteaching as assessment, unit coordinators implemented an authentic assessment task that simulated real world experience. Refinement of the task over three years was important in promoting a deeper reflection of the process for continual improvement of the assessment piece to meet pre-service teachers' needs for practicing teaching. Input, feedback and reflections, from both pre-service teachers and teacher educators, was vital to the action research process in understanding where and how to improve the task.

## **Action research to develop an authentic assessment task**

Action research is a useful process to problem-solve social situations with a view to developing appropriate actions. Action research has been utilised in a variety of ways in numerous settings. Rearick and Feldman (1999) describe three dimensions to action research: theoretical orientation (technical, practical and emancipator), purpose of the research (professional, personal and political) and types of reflection (autobiographical, collaborative and communal). Calhoun (1994) suggests that there are three different types

of action research in education: individual, collaborative and school-wide. In essence, whatever notional framework taken, action research involves identifying a social practice that potentially can be improved. Elements of action research include systematic inquiry of the targeted practice through cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting as well as the direct involvement of those responsible for the targeted practice (Grundy 1982). The current research utilises action research in an educational setting to explore the development of an authentic assessment task. While action research is more frequently conducted in schools by administrators and teachers as a form of professional development (Jackson, Dukerich, & Hestenes, 2008, Slepko, 2008), the current research utilised a practical application of action research to develop an authentic assessment task for pre-service teachers in a one-year Graduate Diploma course in Education.

Authentic assessment involves engaging students in real world tasks that allow them to demonstrate their learning and understanding in practical and relevant ways (Goh 2004). Authentic assessment tasks centre on activities that challenge pre-service teachers in their understanding and application of teaching strategies and beliefs in preparation for using these skills on field experience. The idea of evaluating students on what they actually do, and having them perform and demonstrate tasks in the classroom has been around for quite some time (Popham 2008) and is seen as beneficial in that authentic assessment provides a more meaningful alternative to traditional pencil and paper tests. Authentic assessment is seen as a learning experience that offers feedback on the process undertaken within the assessment task and the outcomes achieved (Killen 2005). Assessment, then, is not seen as an end result of prior learning and a way of providing students with a mark and a position in relation to other students. It is instead, another

opportunity for students to learn and perform important tasks that relate to real world situations. One way of using authentic assessment with pre-service teachers is through microteaching practices. This paper describes how action research was used in the development and implementation of microteaching as an authentic assessment task.

### **Microteaching - Theory into practice**

Microteaching involves pre-service teachers planning and then implementing a short lesson, receiving feedback from peers and their tutor about their teaching, and reflecting on this feedback and their experience to enhance their skills for future planning and teaching. Previous research has identified many benefits from the microteaching process including exposing pre-service teachers to the realities of teaching (Subramaniam 2006), improving the education of pre-service teachers' teaching skills (Borg, Kallenbach, Morris, & Friebel 1969, Yeany 1978) and enabling pre-service teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching (Benton-Kupper 2001).

Pre-service teachers have articulated that the connections between theory, research and practice are often not made explicit during their education degrees (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking 2000, Grossman 2005). Students in our unit of study found that the amount of information they had to learn was extensive and not entirely relevant to actual practice. In response to these concerns, we explored the idea of using microteaching as a way for pre-service teachers to connect theory to practice. Studies indicate that pre-service teachers are better able to make connections between theory and practice by engaging in microteaching episodes (Fernandez & Robinson 2006, Benton-Kupper 2001).

A central feature of the microteaching process is the importance of reflective practice (Sparks-Langer & Colton 1991, Subramaniam 2006, Wilkinson 1996). Many researchers have acknowledged the value of reflection as an essential tool for improving teaching (Hongisfeld & Schiering 2004, Kane et al. 2002, McAlpine & Weston 2002). Reflection enables pre-service teachers to analyse the teaching in which they engage and the impact their teaching has on student learning (Brookfield 1998). Additionally, the teaching choices pre-service teachers make allow them insight into the underlying beliefs they hold about teaching and learning (Parkinson 2005). Poulou (2007) contends that the process of self-reflection allows pre-service teachers to examine who they are, what they believe, and how the experiences they have in classrooms fit with their image of themselves as teachers.

An essential precursor to meaningful reflection is feedback. The process of providing feedback to others and receiving feedback allows pre-service teachers to reflect more deeply on their own teaching using a range of perspectives (Fernandez and Robinson 2006), enabling a wider and deeper understanding of the teaching and learning process (Subramaniam 2006). Feedback however is most valuable when it is specific and focuses on the act of teaching (Benton-Kupper 2001, Gess-Newssome & Lederman 1990). Effective feedback is characterised by four essential elements: it is immediate or given soon after a learner response, it is specific to the task at hand, it provides corrective information for the learner and it has a positive emotional tone (Brophy & Good 1986, Moreno 2004). Providing effective feedback to pre-service teachers is an essential skill for teachers to develop (Bransford et al. 2000, Marzano 2003). As such, feedback becomes an important element of the microteaching process where peers, aware of the theory being taught, can reflect on the skills of the presenters

putting theory into practice. The teaching skills of preparing and delivering a lesson, providing effective feedback to peers and reflecting on their teaching were incorporated into the microteaching assessment.

## **The research design**

The research was guided by an interpretivist-constructivist framework wherein participation in the shared activities assists in constructing new ways of thinking and acting. Through the collaborative construction of knowledge, new constructs can be formed (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). The study analyses the voices of teacher educators and pre-service teachers currently enrolled in a one-year post-graduate degree in education. The brevity of the degree means that the learning and assessment activities require pre-service teachers to engage in actual teaching and learning experiences that reflect those they will undertake in their future classrooms. As such, the microteaching process, with its focus on collaboration, feedback and reflection of an actual teaching task, was viewed as a key way in which to engage pre-service teachers in authentic assessment in a core unit of the degree.

The research took place over the three-year period in which the development of the microteaching sessions as an authentic assessment task occurred. At the end of each semester pre-service teachers respond to a university-wide survey on each of the units they study. Students are asked to rate each unit by responding to statements on a Likert-type scale with additional free-text areas provided where they can type comments. The survey is open for weeks 10-12 of Semester 1 and weeks 10-13 of Semester 2. The strength of this method of data collection is that it captures participants' frame of reference within a specific context, with the evolving events described from the students' perspectives. These perspectives provide insights used for the next step in

the process of refining the unit of study. For the purposes of this paper, only pre-service teachers' qualitative comments provided in the free text areas are reported on.

Qualitative comments to the university-wide survey for each semester of the research were printed out and analysed. Similar comments were grouped together, enabling identification of what students determined were the major problems and benefits of the Unit. To satisfy inter-rater reliability, both authors grouped the comments independently and then compared the dominant themes that each had identified. The themes were continually refined until the key issues and benefits as stated by students were agreed upon by both authors. As the focus of the current investigation was to determine how effective the assessment task had been, comments that did not relate to these factors were disregarded. Key student comments that particularly captured the essence of the key themes were transcribed verbatim as quotes to give voice to the major issues identified by pre-service teachers.

### **The action research process of an authentic assessment task**

In the first iteration of the unit Semester 1, (2005), the previous unit coordinator's assessment piece involved two pre-service teachers presenting a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation simultaneously on the same topic within the same class (a computer lab) with each delivering their lesson to only half the class. Feedback from pre-service teachers in regards to this assessment piece reflected largely on the 'un-user friendly' environment of conducting the tutorials in a computer lab, the brief time-limit to present and the difficulty of having two people present the same topic at the same time at either end of the lab. Feedback indicated that there was a general unhappiness among students with the

running of two presentations in parallel. Students felt that it was too distracting (especially if a presenter had a loud or soft voice) and that tutors were unable to assess the presentation properly as they were constantly required to move from one group to the other. Additionally, students indicated that there was a perception that tutors were using the discussion forums as a way of avoiding formal lectures. Obviously, these concerns needed to be quickly addressed.

In the second iteration of the assessment piece (Semester 1, 2006), the two current unit coordinators had pre-service teachers work in pairs, with each pair giving a half-hour PowerPoint presentation to the entire class in a regular classroom. Time was allowed at the end of the presentations for tutorial members to write feedback for the presenters. In each two-hour tutorial, two topics were presented – one at a time to the class as a whole. The new format was more effective than the previous format from all perspectives; however, feedback from pre-service teachers suggested that there was still room for improvement. Pre-service teachers wanted more tutor input into the microteaching sessions. For example: *She [the tutor] didn't teach us much even though she was prepared to... because every week PowerPoint presentations had to be done and we always ran short of time.* A main problem of this iteration of the assessment piece was that there was little time for serious discussion of the topics to occur once the presentations were completed. Students continued to complain that they felt they were teaching themselves with little input from their tutors and that they may not be getting the best information about teaching that they felt they needed for their upcoming field experiences in schools. Additionally, pre-service teachers tended to present their topics as PowerPoint lectures rather than as a tutorial lesson.

Responding to criticisms, it was essential that the assessment piece be changed. The unit coordinators wanted the task to

be more authentic and, therefore, more practical, for pre-service teachers; that is, that it reflected the tasks that teachers would actually do in the workforce (i.e. develop and deliver an actual lesson). Microteaching was introduced as a new form of authentic assessment (Semester 1, 2007) where students who have an opportunity to, prepare and present a lesson to their peers. To prepare for their microteaching lesson, pre-service teachers were required to learn a topic in the area of Educational Psychology by gathering resources essential to the topic. This notion of pre-service teachers having to first come to understand the material they were to be teaching aligns with the situation most novice teachers face when they go out on field experience for the first time (Fernandez & Robinson 2006). For example, in order to teach in schools, pre-service teachers must first research their topic then plan and prepare their lessons; supervising teachers do not generally handover a complete set of lesson plans for pre-service teachers to teach. By first researching the topic, the presenters in our unit were equipped with essential background knowledge and information for effective teaching.

Pre-service teachers, in groups of either two or three, developed and delivered a 30-minute microteaching session to the class. Pre-service teachers were encouraged to create microteaching sessions that involved active class involvement by preparing activities to be completed in class. For example they may have had peers work on a case study in relation to the topic, do a specific activity, participate in a discussion or debate on the topic or be engaged in any other way. Presenters were expected to demonstrate actual teaching strategies in their microteaching session, and to have a limited reliance on PowerPoint. At the end of the microteaching session, pre-service teachers and the classroom tutor completed a feedback sheet for the presenters. The presenters used this feedback to write a 500-

word reflection on their microteaching session and resource folder. During a two-hour tutorial, two 30-minute microteaching sessions occurred, allowing time for class discussions at the end of each microteaching lesson. This form of assessment proved to be highly regarded by pre-service teachers:

I liked that the tutorial had presentations for most of time. This allowed everyone to have a go a micro session of teaching and to be given feedback.

Each subject was extremely relevant to the "real world". The way the unit was organised allowed us to learn from peers, attempt our own teaching and covered so many aspects of teaching simultaneously.

From student feedback we found that the new form of assessment: microteaching was one that appealed to students as being the most valuable for their learning (see Table 1). We found through this process of assessment, pre-service teachers were more engaged in during tutorial times and found the topics of the unit more relevant to their development as teachers. Working in small groups provided pre-service teachers with support in the development and delivery of their microteaching sessions. Learning how to write (and receive) effective feedback and to critically reflect on their teaching (see below: Tutor modelling of microteaching) allowed pre-service teachers to experience some 'real world' activities of everyday teaching in preparation for their field experience placements.

Table 1. Development of microteaching as an authentic assessment

<b>Iteration</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Changes Made</b>
Semester 1, 2005	15-minute PowerPoint presentation	Unhappiness among students with the running of 2 presentations in	2 students present 1 topic for 30 minutes – allows for better students

		parallel; tutors unable to assess the presentation properly as they were constantly required to move from one group to the other.	concentration, better structure for tutor assessment
Semester 1, 2006	30-minute PowerPoint presentation delivered by students working in pairs	PowerPoint presentations an effective way to learn the topics; not enough time for tutor teaching (worried about being taught by peers) – not given the best information about teaching to prepare for field experience	Make the assessment more authentic – through microteaching
Semester 1, 2007	30-minute small group microteaching presentations; research the topic, present to the class; receive feedback from the class and tutor to complete a self reflection	Made topics more “real world”; able to consider real teaching from different aspects; everyone ‘has a go’ and gets feedback on their work	Need to place more emphasis on the details of being a teacher – e.g. providing effective feedback, being reflective practitioners (Tutor modelling of microteaching session)
Semester 1, 2008	40-minute small group microteaching presentations	Students found the sessions valuable for their own development at	3-hour tutorials instead of 2 – to allow for tutor lecture time of topics

		teaching; felt they actually had an opportunity to learn	
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## **Tutor modelling of microteaching**

In order to assist pre-service teachers with the creation of their resource folder/microteaching lesson, tutors decided to model the process over the first two tutorial sessions of the semester. The decision to model the desired behaviour concurs with constructivist teaching protocol and as part of the Action Research process where it is seen as assisting in aiding students in constructing their own understanding of concepts and practice (Jackson, et al. 2008). In the first session, tutors deliberately made common errors that novice teachers often make. For example, tutors read the notes from the PowerPoint without elaborating on any points to enhance student understanding, thereby focusing on the content of the lesson rather than the process of learning and teaching. As a way to practice giving meaningful feedback, pre-service teachers were required to provide written feedback to their tutors after watching the tutor-delivered microteaching episode. A class discussion followed the microteaching session to draw attention to what was effective and not effective about the session.

After this microteaching, the feedback was analysed by the tutors; feedback from this session tended to be fairly superficial. For example, in asking pre-service teachers to make general comments about the microteaching, we received comments such as: *Needs improvement* and *Bold headings would be good*. When asked to describe what teaching skills were effective and why, feedback we received was: *Formal, standing behind desk* and *Information on PowerPoint – helpful*.

In the second modelled microteaching session, tutors and students brainstormed on the feedback from the previous week. The pre-service teachers identified that the most valuable feedback was that which was specific and provided example or ideas of ways in which the presenters of the microteaching episode could improve their teaching. The tutors then modelled a good demonstration of microteaching. At the end of this microteaching session pre-service teachers were again asked for follow-up feedback. Feedback from this session was greatly improved. For example, when asked to describe what teaching skills were effective and why, feedback we received was: *Engaging discussion – teacher made eye contact and took class opinions seriously and Engaged the audience well by asking for definitions, examples – kept us interested and alert.* Pre-service teachers were able to be more specific in their feedback and provide examples on how the microteaching session could be improved. It was felt that pre-service teachers had experienced two microteaching sessions of various quality and had engaged in exploration of these to determine how best to conduct their own microteaching lessons. This also meant that pre-service teachers had been exposed to two essential resources which enabled them to understand the types of material to be presented in their own lessons and they had practice at giving useful feedback to presenters. Feedback from pre-service teachers about the design of this assessment piece indicated that this format was appreciated, as it was relevant to the needs of the pre-service teachers.

### **The current iteration of microteaching**

At the end of Semester 2 2007, a meeting with tutors to discuss the revamped unit indicated that it had been administratively easier to handle and that pre-service teachers had appeared to understand what was expected of them with relative ease. All tutors felt that the resource folder/microteaching lesson had led to deeper learning for

the pre-service teachers, demonstrated by the in-depth whole class discussions that would follow after each microteaching lesson. Tutors also appreciated the time they had in tutorials to engage pre-service teachers in deep discussions about the topic areas, and felt that they had made meaningful connections with their pre-service teachers. There was general agreement that pre-service teachers had created valuable resource folders so that by the end of semester each person in the tutorial had a folder on each of the ten topics covered in the microteaching lessons.

The microteaching exercise was received favourably by most pre-service teachers. Largely, pre-service teachers appeared energised and involved in the tutorials. Comments such as:

I feel the best aspects of this course were the interactions amongst peers throughout the presentations.

The tutorials allowed us to actually learn something. The open discussions in tutorials were a great way to promote learning.

I found that lessons presented were valuable for my own development when I delivered the lesson.

Their microteaching sessions were largely well done and most pre-service teachers spoke of being grateful for the opportunity to practice and develop their teaching skills. As coordinators of this unit, we realised that we had made valuable decisions about the teaching pedagogy underlying our choice of assessment task, but we had failed to articulate these to our pre-service teachers. Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) stated that pre-service teachers need to be informed of what learning strategies are being used and what the advantages of such strategies are, in order for them to see the value in the unit and appreciate the choices made. We realised that in future semesters, we must spend some time in the beginning tutorials explaining the pedagogical choices made to pre-service teachers.

Thus, for Semester 1 2008, emphasis in the Unit Outline and in the first few tutorials focused on explaining to pre-service teachers why the assessment pieces had been developed the way they were. It was outlined to pre-service teachers that they had one year in which to become efficient teachers, and that it was imperative that the assessment tasks they did reflected the skills they would actually need and use as teachers. It was impressed upon them that as teachers they would be expected to keep up to date with current research and knowledge, and would therefore need the skills to find and understand this knowledge on their own, without expert assistance. The microteaching lesson was clearly focused as a way to directly practice essential teaching skills, particularly those that lead to facilitating the learning of pre-service teachers in the classroom.

In the current iteration (Semester 1 2008), tutors modelled the lesson only once after which a class discussion was conducted which involved a comprehensive dissecting of what went well and what could be improved upon in the lesson. Pre-service teachers completed feedback sheets on the lesson and these were immediately analysed in class in relation to the effectiveness of the feedback offered. The need to provide specific feedback that focused on ways in which the presenter could improve was discussed, and pre-service teachers discussed how particular comments on their feedback sheets could be re-written to meet this goal. As in the previous semester, pre-service teachers delivered their microteaching session in class, received feedback from their peers and their tutor, and used this feedback to write a self-evaluation of their resource folder and microteaching session. Feedback to this iteration was largely positive:

A vast body of knowledge spread across different content areas was able to be shared across small groups in line with microteaching topics. This gave all students an opportunity to specialise in one area, share this "expertise" with colleagues, whilst not missing out on specialised

content from other topics. Additionally, peer feedback in addition to staff feedback gave a welcome perspective on presentations and resource folders.

The presentation style assessment. I found that extremely useful. Although it was extremely time consuming, I feel like I have a complete understanding. Made me look at areas I don't normally get to explore.

## **Reflections on the research**

Anecdotal feedback from tutors who had taught the unit since Semester 1 2007, identified that the changes made for Semester 1 2008 had resulted in a positive impact on pre-service teachers and tutors alike. It was noted that the pre-service teachers preferred the active learning mode as opposed to transmission teaching. Discussions in class at the end of each microteaching session were found to be more in-depth and fruitful, with pre-service teachers openly questioning how they would approach a range of situations once in the classroom. Pre-service teachers often identified the positive correlation between the information they were learning about from research and theory and what they were learning in a practical way through the microteaching assessment piece and unit structure. The self-reflections written by pre-service teachers at the end of the assessment piece tended to demonstrate a greater awareness of the intention behind the assessment (to get them thinking and behaving like teachers). Pre-service teachers' self-reflections often ended with a statement outlining their appreciation in regards participating in developing and delivering the assessment as a means of aiding in developing their teaching skills for field experience. Formal end of semester feedback from the pre-service teachers indicated a positive regard for the unit and the microteaching assessment piece. This feedback will be used to make additional refinements to the unit.

Feedback from tutors reflects the positive responses of the pre-service teachers. Tutors found that the delivery of the current iteration of the tutorials ran more smoothly, the content covered was done in more depth and students were more attentive in class. One tutor reported that her class rated this tutorial the best of her coursework to date as she could make the connections between theory and practice and so found what she had anticipated to be obscure topics highly relevant to her preparation for teaching. These responses indicate the value of conducting action research as a way to continually monitor and improve teaching practices. Through involvement in action research, teacher educators can keep current about how best to make their subject relevant and up to date with the learning needs of students.

The continual refinement of the microteaching exercise over a two-year period, and the importance of incorporating feedback and reflection into this process, has been highly beneficial for a number of reasons. Engaging in microteaching sessions has aided post-graduate pre-service teachers in their professional development as they have learnt a unique way to monitor their own teaching practices in a safe and supportive environment. As feedback in teaching and learning is fundamentally important, this research incorporated the voices of pre-service teachers and outlined the ways in which their input helped shaped decisions made regarding the development of the unit structure and assessment. Through listening to pre-service teachers and fellow teacher educators, and through continually reflecting on the structure, purpose and outcomes of utilising microteaching episodes, teacher educators can implement an authentic assessment piece that provides real world experience as part of teacher education for post-graduate students. It is envisaged that the process for the continual improvement of this authentic assessment

piece will aid in meeting the needs of post-graduate pre-service teachers.

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# **Peer observation of teaching: An optimistic approach for collegiate professional development**

Shane Pill and Russell Brown

This article argues that it is valuable for all who are involved in teaching in higher education to reflect on and develop their teaching by engaging in collegiate professional development through collaborative action research. Drawing upon our experiences as physical education lecturers, we demonstrate how action research can facilitate professional learning for the enhancement of teaching and curriculum construction. As a form of learning through reflection, action research is able to integrate the academic work of teaching and researching. A framing system for peer observation of teaching (POT) as action research for collegial professional development is illustrated and explained. Six elements of the model are subsequently explained in further detail to advocate and explain the process of peer observation of teaching for professional development.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary concerns about quality teaching in Higher Education settings (HES), arising from the demands of a larger and more diverse student group, and a greater awareness of the multiple learning styles and learning needs, are combining with increasing requirements to address the current and future needs of students as lifelong learners. This has increased the demand for HES to focus attention on the analysis of teaching and the construction of contexts for learning. (Kember 2000, Dunne 1999).

A focus on the analysis of teaching and the construction of contexts for learning requires investment of time for the

purposes of reflection and discourse about students, learning and learning contexts. In HES, finding this time can be challenging due to the competing categories of HES educators' work. Setting aside time for critical reflection and review of teaching and contexts for learning may be a challenge, however, "teaching and learning will remain core purposes of all higher education institutions and a key reason for public investment in universities" (DEST 2002, p.1).

This article addresses the research question, 'What value is action research using peer observation of teaching (POT) for collegial professional development?' The article will set out the context within which the project occurred and explain POT as a valid method for data collection during action research. The results of the study will be presented as both a model for action research in HES settings and include those themes that emerged from our reflective learning. These results will be discussed within the context of POT as an instrument for collegiate professional development and as a process for teaching as being a scholarly activity.

## **Context**

The study was situated within a foundation studies physical education topic that both authors taught. The participants in this study were both experienced educators, where the peer being observed was an established HES educator and the peer HES observer was new to teaching, but was experienced in other educational settings. It was hypothesized by the established HES educator that their colleague could provide valuable feedback on the construction of the topic curriculum. The experience of the two participants meant that neither felt the need for outside support to focus on the practice of teaching.

This study was therefore proposed for pragmatic reasons to address local needs (Tomkinson & Kahn 2003). A form of cooperative professional development, the project evolved to serve two intents: a) collegial professional development through reflective learning; and b) action research for topic curriculum development, using peer observation of teaching (POT) as the tool for data collection.

### **Methodology: Action research using peer observation of teaching**

Action research is a valid form of professional development because it is focused on competence in a professional role and possesses the intent to improve personal performance (Beaty 2003). Action research places learning through reflection into context as it combines reflective learning with vigorous research and a community of inquiry through publication of the learning for peer consideration and review. It involves theorising and the identification of action points and areas for further study. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) proposes a construction for action research using the acronym 'CRASP' - Critical attitude, Research into teaching, Accountability and Self-evaluation leading to Professionalism. This project illustrated good practice in action research, as the observation was framed through a critical lens, which was informed by research into teaching, academic accountability for the professional preparation of pre-service teachers and critical self-evaluation by both the established HES educator and the peer HES observer.

Active construction of knowledge about the teaching occurred through observation of the teaching, critical reflection upon the content, and observation of student engagement with the curriculum. This is consistent with a premise of action research that the participants are viewed as active constructors of knowledge rather than passive

observers and recorders of information. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) builds upon the discourse of action research as critical inquiry for the construction of knowledge to define action research as

collaborative, critical enquiry by the academics themselves (rather than expert educational researchers) into their own teaching practice, into problems of student learning and into curriculum problems. It is professional development through academic course development, group reflection, action, evaluation and improved practice (pp.1-2).

The research project structure was facilitated by the study not being an additional time demand for the project participants. One HES educator was released from teaching responsibilities within the topic being reviewed, replacing those responsibilities with that of researcher for professional learning and curriculum development. POT was the instrument for reflective practice and data collection in this study.

To call someone a “peer” is to imply a relationship within an organisational structure or field of experience. Peers may have similar or differential status. To observe a peer is to examine their activities with intent. Peel (2005) determined that POT can be placed into two categories based on its intended use as developmental or judgmental. This project clearly had developmental intentions, as the premise was to review and restructure the topic to better meet the professional preparation objectives of a pre-service teacher.

### **Literature review: Peer observation of teaching in higher education settings**

POT in HES can be traced back to an initial developmental intention through Peer Review of Teaching initiatives, introduced in the early 1960’s in response to student-led demand for improvements in educational experiences

(D'Andrea 2002). In many institutions this evolved into POT with judgmental intent as an element of staff development programs focused on evaluation and decisions regarding tenure and promotion, rather than as a means for improving students' learning experiences (D'Andrea 2002). Observation can be a tool for professional learning through structured examination (Gutknecht-Gmenier 2005, Svinicki & Lewis 2002). This is not the same observational intent as for performance review, which is a limiting observation paradigm. This limiting use of POT constrains the potential for growth and development as it restricts the data to performance feedback. When used as a performance measurement and rating tool, POT "underplays the role of reflection ... that may facilitate the personal change and growth of the teacher" (Peel 2005, p. 501).

POT can also only bring attention to that which is visible and therefore cannot illuminate the thought processes and emotion leading to, and resulting from, action. Furthermore, it is not a neutral process, as the observer brings their bias, as an expression of their beliefs and values developed through experience, to the act of observation (Gosling 2002, Friesner & Hart 2005). The dialectical inquiry that follows the observation is where the knowledge generation occurs. This promotes POT in HES for professional learning, through a consideration of the potential for POT as collegial professional development, where dialectical inquiry is twinned with the process of peer observation. POT for collegial professional development rather than for the instrumentality of peer review for tenure and promotional purposes, particularly in HES, is not an area of action research that has been given enough consideration.

## **Peer observation of teaching as an agent for professional development**

An important aspect of POT as an agent for professional growth and development is that it potentially opens up the teaching process to provide insights into that which has traditionally been a private affair between a teacher and their students (Gutknecht-Gmenier 2005, D'Andrea 2002, Chappell 2003). We recognized early in this project the importance of mutual and frank dialogue as part of the process of analysing the observations, the thoughts and emotions arising. This was considered important in overcoming the inherent weakness of POT in that it typically fails to make apparent thoughts and emotions that lead to, and stem from, the observed action. Mutual and frank dialogue facilitates professional learning and the production of knowledge.

POT, involving collaborative reflective thinking, and the analysis of observed behaviour, beliefs and attitudes, is noted as containing the potential to improve, refine and adjust practice (Tinning, et al. 2001) for both the observed and the observer. When the observer is also concurrently engaged in learning and improving personal practice from the process, POT can be considered collegial professional development. "Observation offers tremendous potential to promote self knowledge and professional development, particularly when it is part of a continuing process" (Shortland in Peel 2005, p. 492). As a form of promotion of self-knowledge and professional development, POT therefore becomes concerned with data generated by the researcher for the researcher and becomes a form of autobiographical 'insider research' (Anderson & Jones 2000), because the research is both created and used in the same setting.

## Discussion

The research data generated for this study was therefore both for the observer and the observed. For both of us, this critically reflective autobiographical data centred upon the educators' personal professional knowledge. Personal professional knowledge is recognised as potentially having a powerful impact upon personal understanding, day to day decision making and problem solving (Anderson & Jones, 2000). Autobiographical research has strong links to action research in the qualitative research tradition.

Not surprisingly, many teacher educators have found that crossing the line between assisting teachers to study their practice and studying one's own comes easily, almost naturally (Bullough & Pinnegar 2001, p. 14).

In this project, the autobiographical research data was particularly instrumental to the observer as a tool to reflect upon practice for specific consideration in 'what was important' in the development of a new topic.

The products emerging from this project, including a guiding philosophical document for the degree program within which this study was embedded, have been the subject of another paper. The results presented in this paper contain both the themes emerging from the autobiographical reflective learning of the authors and an emerged model through which to guide this type of action research in a HES setting. The emergent themes from the dialectal inquiry associated with POT will be discussed within the context of POT as the instrument for both collegiate professional development and as a process for teaching as research being a scholarly activity. The following headings directing the discussion indicate our reflective learning.

### *1. A model for collegial professional development*

Improving teaching requires “a theory that helps teachers reflect on what they are doing” (Biggs 1999, p. 60). A model for collegial professional development emerged from the early dialogue of the participants as an aid for understanding the process of reflection and the manner with which it was impacting upon our teaching during this study. In order to structure the conversations between the observer and the observed so that a full, frank and mutual exchange could occur from which meaningful ideas could emerge, the need for a framing system arose. The diagram below (Figure 1) lays out this model.

We propose that it illustrates the way teaching is potentially twinned with the academic work of research to create a context for professional learning and the scholarship of teaching through POT. Boyer (1990 in Tomkinson & Kahn 2003, p. 6) defines scholarship of teaching and learning as “engaging in original research” for the discovery or contribution of knowledge, application, integration of interdisciplinary elements, and the dissemination of information to others about teaching. The model illustrated situates POT for collegial professional development as action research which promotes the scholarship of teaching.

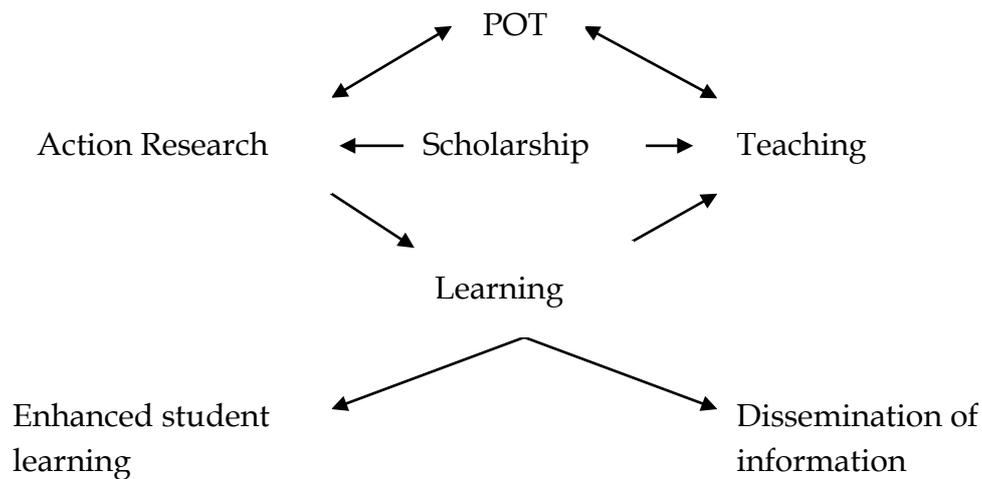


Figure 1. POT for collegial professional development.

In the framing system of POT for collegial professional development, POT generates data that informs both the teaching of the participants and enables the generation of disseminable knowledge. This knowledge can inform teaching and learning in other similar contexts or where the educators are considering similar questions about their work with students. As the participants are considering research relevant to the question being investigated, and the data being generated is developing knowledge to enhance teaching and learning in the local context, a broader scholarship of teaching is enacted.

Peer observation therefore becomes action research which develops the scholarship of teaching. The coupling of POT and teaching scholarship situates the educator as both a learner and a teacher, as learning and work (teaching and research) are not considered separated activities. POT becomes the instrument of action research that generates data that informs teaching to empower the teaching and learning outcomes of the individual educator, while also providing a source of data that can potentially inform

teaching and learning more broadly within and beyond the institution. This is an area of HES teaching requiring further consideration, as it offers the potential for HES educators to meet research work requirements without having to enter the teaching versus research dichotomy.

Teaching and learning therefore become entwined. We propose that this as an important concept for HES as “successful organisations should themselves learn” (Knapper 2001, p. 132) and be learning organisations that promote discussion about the context and nature of work, team learning and collaboration, and the creation of ongoing learning opportunities. In a HES focusing on the study of education, this would appear to be particularly synonymous. HES institutions focusing on the study of education should be ideally placed to promote the scholarship of teaching however, for this to occur there must be a commitment to systemic structures that allow for collaboration amongst educators on questions and issues about practice. POT for collegial professional development offers a potential systemic structure through which institutional learning that enhances teaching and learning can occur.

For HES education to be regarded as a scholarly activity requires consensus that teaching is a research-based profession. We argue that part of this research is legitimately the autobiographical process of researching one’s educational theories through critical self-reflection. When engaged in collaborative participative research it is both professional development for the individual and research. As the research partner observing the action, one addresses the research question and concurrently interacts with personal theories of practice. Professional learning through reflection can therefore be prompted in the dialectical inquiry associated with the examination of the data collected during the observation of teaching.

The quality which ultimately defines the process as scholarly is the evidence of change or enhanced practice, with the intent to improve students' educational outcomes. Discourse centred on student learning, the enhancement of the learning context (Cornwell 2002) and the enhancement of the participant's teaching practice situates and provides contextual validity and relevance for POT as research. The model presented therefore locates discourse centred on student learning, the learning context and the practical philosophy of the educators as integral to the daily work of educators as teachers and researchers in HES as other forms of scholarship.

### **Why a framing system was needed**

The need for a framing system through which to understand POT as action research informing the scholarship of teaching, was an important element that emerged in the early discussions associated with this project. A way forward for the discernment of themes to inform each others' practice, and the ability to process the discussions, was enabled once we had this framing system. It enabled us both to explain to colleagues how the project was mutually beneficial to each participant, personally and professionally. Research of the literature failed to reveal a model for POT as collegial professional development, which leads to a scholarship of teaching, and so we needed to generate one in order to understand the task they were undertaking.

*2. Peer observation of teaching can be participative research with, for and by people rather than research on people*

Collaboration is emphasised as an important element of the action research process (Zuber-Skerritt 1992a). We have concluded that an educational setting that systematically and consistently engages in collaboration for exploration that further develops teaching, and the dissemination of that information for peer review beyond the context of the

collaboration, has the potential to situate the scholarship of teaching within the broader context of a 'learning community' (Gibbs, et al. 2004). Within the context of a learning community, action research through peer observation of teaching would be actively participative, as educators are engaged as "interactive partners, collaborating in an educational project as critical thinkers and as mutual learners" (Gibbs, et al. 2004, p. 184). This perspective encourages educators as learners who come together in action research projects for the common purpose of sharing insights and understanding about the beliefs and values that drive educational practice, ultimately for the enhancement of student learning.

### *3. Peer Observation of Teaching is reflective learning*

Deliberating upon the process of POT was an integral element of the project if it was to be more than a judgmental action on behalf of the observer. Peel (2005) has suggested that reflecting on the raw mechanics of POT as a tool to enhance teaching practice helps situate the observer-learner. This certainly proved to be the case for the participant observer. Researching POT and discussing its instrumentality for autobiographical reflection and critical ethnography for the observer was essential in constructing this project as mutually participative research. It provided the pointers to the values and education principles active, out of which the critical appraisal and questions would arise. For the participant being observed, clarifying how the process would provide the necessary data for reflection was important in structuring the project, as POT is not a value-neutral endeavour.

POT interacts with an educator's professional identity, which is grounded in beliefs and values about learning and experience with pedagogical frameworks. Through the adoption of a critical lens, informed by mutual and frank

discussion of the data collected and statements recorded during the observation, POT has the potential to be a reflective practice that stimulates interaction with an educator's beliefs and values. POT can therefore provide for a context within which there can be growth in knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning. We found that POT has the potential to enhance an educator's effectiveness in creating curriculum and learning contexts, by promoting an understanding of the personal investment of the educator in curriculum construction and the process of teaching.

#### *4. Peer observation of teaching: Enhancing organisational capacity*

We suggest that the enhancement of individual teaching effectiveness that is stimulated by the reflective dialogue inherent in action research using collaborative POT, can become an important element in growing organisational capacity. Senge, et al (1990) have indicated that "organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs" (p. 139). We propose that HES should prioritise supporting and embedding those activities that stimulate enhanced professional practice, such as action research using POT. HES should naturally be concerned with knowledge production and dissemination that occurs through research in naturalized settings of teaching and learning, as well as through controlled scientific experimentation.

"The University is a place of learning. As academic workers in universities, our business is learning: our students' learning, our own learning, our society's learning" (Rowland, et al. 1998, p. 133). Unfortunately, HES organisational structures are not always supportive of collaborative engagement and reflective processes. For POT to become an embedded work practice requires a group

commitment to a cycle of continuous reflective learning to enhance individual and collective teaching capacity. It appears particularly possible where two or more academics are involved in the teaching of a topic and this teaching relationship can be configured as peer teaching. Peer teaching provides the possibility for one person to sit back from the teaching process and act as observer for constructive critical reflection. Constructing these relationships strategically can create an embedded culture of collaborative, actively participative research “to capture and share learning” (Watkins & Marsick 1993 in Silins 2001, p. 79). As an embedded practice of an organisation’s reflective learning, POT moves a HES towards a learning community model, because it will do more than spread knowledge; it will make a habit of creating and using knowledge creatively (Basadur & Gelade 2006) through an embedded system that supports individuals and teams to integrate learning with work. In this project, we were teaching within the topic and one was released to act as the peer observer. It is highly unlikely that this project would have been possible without the team teaching element already apparent in the topic, as extra funding was not available to secure release from teaching.

#### *4. Peer observation of teaching for scholarship and collegial professional development requires a question of significance*

This project has demonstrated that POT promotes professional development for participants when the institutional structure and the beliefs and values of the participants are challenged by a central question that is of significance. The significance of a question in reflective research using POT lies in two parts. Firstly, the question needs to be of importance to the work of the participants so that it stimulates and requires reflection in and upon action that engages the participant’s beliefs and values. Secondly, the question must also be of importance to the

understanding or the further development of the work of the individuals and the institution.

At this point it is important to distinguish between POT for collegial professional development and POT for mentoring, induction and assessment. It would have been easy to allow this project to slide into POT for peer mentoring that potentially became an induction for the new academic, or a process leading to a peer review that contributed data to the experienced HES academic's promotion profile. POT that mutually involves the professional development of the observer and the observed, locates the responsibility for learning and engagement in the process of reflection. The dialogue of discernment needs to be situated upon the observer as it much as it does on the observed. This is unlike POT for mentoring, induction or assessment, which invokes a master-apprentice type relationship, where the emphasis is on the person observed. We found POT for collegial professional development to be predicated on an understanding and commitment by all participants who were equally both a learner and a leader. Continual dialogue between research partners was essential to maintain the self-reflective and practical focus of the act of observation. The tendency for observation to narrow in focus onto teaching style and efficacy, and to therefore become judgmental of teaching, is ever present. Both participants need to be conscious of this potential slippage and be prepared to 'raise the alert' should it occur.

*5. Peer observation of teaching for collegial professional development requires intentional engagement by all participants*

If POT is to be valued as a form of collegial professional development, there must be intentional engagement with the beliefs and values that inform pedagogical practice by those involved. Participants must become full and active research partners to learn from the social experience of collaboration.

The observer as researcher is instrumental in data collection as participant-observer, as well as instrumental in contributing data. This contribution requires being able to name beliefs and values about teaching and the ability to clearly articulate assumptions about the construction of learning, and learning environments, at the outset and throughout the duration of the study.

A capacity for non-judgemental contestation of ideas provides for learning through reflection to occur. A conceptual framework for this process (previously presented in Figure 1) was essential to focus the reflective practice on knowledge acquisition rather than judgment of performance. Prioritising time to meet regularly and time at the start of each meeting to affirm the process, the research task, purpose for meeting, the expected outcomes from the meeting, roles each would take during the meeting and agreed boundaries for the discussion, were critical steps preceding the analysis of the study.

#### *6. Peer observation of teaching: Autoethnographic research*

The theoretical driver for this project was an inductive logic, as the project required describing and understanding each other through the biography of teaching, that created the theoretical and practical perspectives that each brought to the reflective conversations. Inductive logic is a feature of qualitative research design (Qualitative Research Design 2006). Qualitative researchers have been encouraged to consider how their personal subjectivity influences and informs the investigative process. This can occur in qualitative research through autoethnography.

Autoethnography can encourage empathy beyond the self in order to contribute to sociological understandings about teaching and learning (Spry 2001). We found that POT stimulated reflective dialogue that prompted autobiographical moments essential in the exchange of frank

and mutual discernment of the data collected during the observations. It was these autobiographical moments that opened the gates to enlightenment of our practice as we prompted and probed each other's assumptions and how they came into being. This operationalised the notion of a critical consciousness (McIlveen 2008), as the meaning of the stories was not what ultimately became important, rather, it was the commitment to developing theoretical understandings via the narrative visibility of the self.

Using POT to stimulate autoethnography as a method for reflective action research is an emerging area of research. The deliberate prompting of autoethnographic moments was found to be instrumental in analysing the POT in a reflective rather than judgmental frame. A conscious engagement in the self by the observer was found to be necessary if the observation was to inform the teaching practice of the observer as well as developing knowledge for the participant being observed. It was necessary to follow the question, 'What would I do differently?' with, 'Why would I do it differently?' to substantiate whether the observation was valid or not.

It is our assertion that action research, using POT as the tool for data collection that deliberately prompts autoethnographic moments by the researchers, is a qualitative research design requiring further consideration within teacher educator research. Drawing on personal understanding to reflexively look more deeply at the ideas and values informing the way one goes about thinking about one's teaching practice and designing and enacting teaching, has the potential to contribute deeper understandings about teaching and in particular, why teaching, for many, tends to be a conservative practice resistant to change.

## Conclusion

We believe that POT is an effective means of scholarship for teaching and learning, as it provides an opportunity to address research questions of local value, promoting collaboration between colleagues and providing a vehicle for the dissemination of information that can impact on practice locally and more globally (Tomkinson & Kahn 2003). POT, as a method of action research for enhanced curriculum construction and learning delivery, is however, highly context-specific. The institutional context, the research question and intent and the professional identity of participants, influence the data collection, reflection and analysis and subsequent application and creative endeavour.

This article reports the insights gained from an action research project using POT for collegial professional development in a higher education physical education setting. Papers analysing our engagement with our own beliefs and values through this project and, the resulting product, philosophical positioning of physical education in a HES and the physical education curriculum development that occurs as a result of analysis of the data and philosophy paper generated, have been presented elsewhere and so have not been considered in this article.

We have argued that action research using POT is an effective method for collegial professional development. The use of POT in this project proved to be a successful means of knowledge management and creative endeavor. It allowed questions about practice to surface and opportunities for curriculum change and action to become apparent.

The importance of POT for collegial professional development actively engaging educators' beliefs, values and pedagogical frameworks was apparent in this project.

This required the courage to reveal autobiographical vignettes emphasising social and cultural moments influential in the construction of our teaching selves and their application to the research process during the research meetings.

We acknowledge that it will be a challenge for HES to support action research using POT for professional development as part of a scholarship of teaching, as it will require it to be situated and embedded within a broader spectrum of what is considered scholarly activity. Valuing the institution as a learning community is a starting point. Flexible timetabling and staffing that enables team teaching is also necessary. Further research exploring strategies that enhance POT's contribution to the scholarship of teaching and as a means for quality professional development in HES, are encouraged. We suggest that four clear areas for further research are; 1) HES institutional use of POT for learning and scholarship; 2) the use of POT for purposeful connection with student reflective data to more broadly inform teaching and learning; 3) POT as an intentional process for professional development through autoethnography; and 4) the use of POT by HES as a method of reflective professional development that can inform, and form, the induction of early career academics and the novice educator in a HES, still forming and shaping their professional identity and developing an understanding of their own pedagogical frameworks.

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# **Systemic Governance and Accountability: Working and Reworking the Conceptual and Spatial Boundaries**

## **Book Review**

*Systemic Governance and Accountability: Working and Reworking the Conceptual and Spatial Boundaries*, Janet McIntyre-Mills, Vol 3 C. West Churchman and Related Works Series, John P. Van Gigh (Series Editor), Springer, New York, 2006. Pp. 437, Tables, Photographs, Footnotes, Conceptual Maps, Bibliography, Hardbound, 115 Euros.

Providing the means by which contemporary governance approaches can respond to and use contemporary “systems thinking” and practices is an urgent as well very difficult challenge. In this text, McIntyre embraces the local to global scale of perceiving reality as the context for threading systemic, emancipatory and participatory research and development theories into a rich array of governance practices. These include decision-making and alternatives to decision-making, dialogue, policy development and testing, representative and participatory system design and operations such as service delivery.

Her recurring message is that participatory action research is a trustworthy and effective means of shifting outmoded forms of democracy into forms that can cope with the

density, speed and dire natures of the issues that we are facing. In her own words:

It is about exploring ways to revitalize sustainable democracy. Participatory action research aims to earn trust through better communication and better praxis...to improve quality of life, because it is in the interests of sustainable governance and international relations (p.31).

Following a Prologue, which maps out her core questions and the book's primary purposes, the book is divided into two parts. Part 1 is theoretical and addresses the question "what is the process of accountable communication and governance?" Part 2 is practice-based, presenting case studies, "vignettes" and many conceptual propositions drawn from the author's own research work.

The case studies cross many different fields of application including mental health, community development, child welfare, prison management, social inclusion, Aboriginal housing, information technology, and infrastructure concerns such as energy and water. The locations include Australia, South Africa and Nepal. One of McIntyre's many strengths is her determination to bring the propositions "home" by discussing their implications within the current Australian politic.

The text has a variety of styles: expansive theoretical reflections, detailed and informative footnotes, bullet pointed lists with bolded text to assist with easy searching and reuse, touching accounts of conversations with others, which bring the discussions into the everyday, extensive conceptual maps, diagrams and many comparative tables to sharpen distinctions.

The work is valuable to a variety of stakeholders in her questions: students and teachers of political science, leadership and peace studies; policy makers addressing the challenges of shifting the subterranean architectures of thinking and leadership; systems thinkers and practitioners looking for ways into more mainstream arenas of engagement; and participatory action researchers looking to work their (and their co-researchers') grounded theories and practices further into the systems that they would perturb in the interests of sustainability and justice.

The underpinning principle of the work is what McIntyre calls "extended pragmatism," a principle, which overcomes the disastrous assumption that the practical cannot embody the ideal. Through participatory dialogue, design and planning, field-testing and compassionate consideration of the consequences of decisions on those with least capacity to influence them, extended pragmatism provides a means for systemic transformation. There is a very useful toolbox to support this idea. It stretches from the simple - De Bono's thinking hats - to the complex - rich pictures. This toolbox is illustrated in action throughout the second part of the book, folding in philosophy and theory with situated narrative and praxis.

McIntyre's text is a full harvest of ideas and resources. It is courageous and provocative, true to her participatory integrity. It is not a fast read so much as a timely and lasting resource for those stepping into new modes of system facilitation to enable societal transformation towards sustainability.

Susan Goff (PhD)

# Action Research and New Media: Concepts, Methods, and Cases Book Review

*Action Research and New Media: Concepts, Methods, and Cases*, Greg Hearn, Jo Tacchi, Marcus Foth, and June Lennie, Hampton Press, Cresskill New Jersey, 2009. Pp. 292, Illustrations, References, Author Index, Subject Index, Paperback, US\$67.50.

I had the pleasure of reviewing *Action Research and New Media* and found it to provide a timely discussion of how action research methodology can be integrated into the exploration, development and application of today's new media. I found this text to be both relevant to my own research interests around the use of action research to better understand and inform my own efforts in providing access to and creation of media and appropriate for use with my graduate students in library science who are emergent researchers in both new media and action research methodology. This book is available from Hampton Press at <<http://www.hamptonpress.com>>.

As the title suggests, this book provides an in-depth discussion of concepts, methods and cases related to the praxis of action research and new media. According to the authors,

action learning was seen as particularly appropriate to new media initiatives because they involve constant innovation and change, have

unpredictable outcomes, and require flexibility, creativity, and an inclusive, user-centred approach (p. 20).

Beginning with section one, which addresses key concepts, methods and tools related to both title themes, the authors guide the reader through a well-organized, logically sequenced analysis and explication in the second section of advanced approaches to the use of action learning in the context of new media, including, Ethnographic Action Research, Network Action Research, and Anticipatory Action Research. Section three follows with a series of case studies to provide examples of how action research and new media have been studied in four different research settings. The book concludes with a summary of the concepts addressed throughout the title and a discussion of future directions for this emerging field of study. The book is enhanced by an extensive list of abbreviations used throughout the text and the inclusion of boxes of supplementary text for elaboration on a particular term, concept, or method. Figures and tables are used throughout the text to clarify, expand on, or illustrate each chapter, thus bringing added value through visual representations of data and processes discussed. Also included are an extensive list of references, an author index, and a subject index.

The authors of this book have provided a thought-provoking discussion of how action research can be used as an effective and ethical means of exploring the “communicative ecology” of new media. By this, the authors suggest that researchers should take a more holistic perspective by considering the impact of new media technologies “within a broader understanding of the whole structure of communication and information in people’s lives” (p. 31). They argue that, “action research is an especially appropriate methodology for developing, researching, evaluating, and managing new media project” (p. 209), This argument is supported through

a balanced discussion of theory and practice, written in a way that takes the reader through a logical transition from the theoretical underpinnings of a concept, to practical strategies and techniques, to case studies in which the theories presented are put into action. I found these case studies included in section three particularly useful in providing detailed examples that I can share with my own students interested in exploring ways to give voice to the lived experiences of stakeholders who may be disenfranchised or living on the fringes of our society.

While certain portions of this text may be challenging for those new to action research and new media, it generally provides a straightforward and approachable coverage of issues related to new media action research that can be of great use to intermediate and expert readers, in particular, who are interested in exploring this emerging field of research.

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ALARA membership also provides information on special interest email and web based 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 ALARA membership application form is below.

## **ALARA organisational membership**

ALARA 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 invite organisational memberships – as Affiliates or Associates of ALARA.

## **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 ALARA website <<http://www.alara.net.au>> to your website if you have one. Our new website allows your organisation to write its own descriptive paragraph to go with its link;
- Occasional emails from ALARA about events or activities or resources that you may like to send on to your whole membership.
- Members of organisations who become ALARA Affiliates or Associates may also chose to become an individual member of ALARA 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 ALARA, your own organisational membership will be waived;
- Members of ALARA Affiliates or Associates who join ALARA individually will receive full individual membership and voting rights, world congress and annual conference discounts (all they need to do is name the ALARA Affiliate or Associate organisation/network on their membership form).

Please note: members of ALARA Affiliates or Associates who become discount individual ALARA members receive an electronic 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 ALARA membership application forms.

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

ALARA Inc  
PO Box 1748  
Toowong Qld 4066  
Australia

Email: [admin@alara.net.au](mailto:admin@alara.net.au)

Fax: 61-7-3342-1669

# INDIVIDUAL MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION FORM

I wish to apply for membership of the Action Learning, Action Research Association (ALARA) Inc.

## Personal Details

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

Please send mail to:       Home                       Work

## Current Employment

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

My interests/projects relating to action learning, action research:

<input type="checkbox"/> Action Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Manager and Leadership Dev
<input type="checkbox"/> Action Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Methodology/Methods
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Action/Dev	<input type="checkbox"/> Org Change and 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 and Dev
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational Education/HR
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
_____	
<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 ALARA 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)*

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

\$104.50 AUD **Mailing Address outside Australia**  
Full membership for people with mailing address *outside* Aus

\$49.50 AUD **Concessional membership within or outside Australia**  
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 must be made payable to ALARA Inc. in Australian dollars. Please return application with payment details to:***

ALARA INC.

PO Box 1748, Toowong, Qld 4066, Australia

Fax: (61-7) 3342 1669

Email: [admin@alara.net.au](mailto:admin@alara.net.au)

# ORGANISATIONAL MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION FORM

We wish to apply for membership of the Action Learning, Action Research Association (ALARA) 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

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

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

<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 and Leadership Dev <input type="checkbox"/> Methodology/Methods <input type="checkbox"/> Org Change and 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 and 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 ALARA 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 ALARA (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)*

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

\$104.50 AUD **Mailing Address outside Australia**  
 Full membership for organisations with mailing address *outside* Australia

**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 be in Australian dollars and made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. Please return completed application with payment details to:***

ALARA INC.  
 PO Box 1748, Toowong, Qld 4066, Australia  
 Admin:        Donna Alleman  
 Fax:            (61-7) 3342 1669  
 Email:        admin@alara.net.au

# ALAR JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTION FORM

## Address Details

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

## Payment Details

**ALAR Journal subscription (2 issues per year) does not include ALARA 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 must be made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. in Australian dollars. Please return completed application with payment details to:**

ALARA INC.  
 PO Box 1748, Toowong Qld 4066, Australia  
 Admin: Donna Alleman  
 Fax: (61-7) 3342 1669  
 Email: alar@alara.net.au

## JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS CRITERIA AND REVIEWING PROCESS

The Action Learning Action Research Journal (ALARj) contains substantial articles, project reports, information about activities, reflections on seminars and conferences, short articles related to the theory and practice of action learning, action research and process management, and reviews of recent publications. It aims to be highly accessible for both readers and contributors. It is particularly accessible to practitioners.

Please send all contributions in Microsoft Word format by email (not a disk) to **alar@alara.net.au**

### *Guidelines*

ALARj is a journal (provided in PDF, with hard copies available) devoted to the communication of the theory and practice of action research and related methodologies generally. As with all ALARA activities, all streams of work are welcome in the journal including:

- action research
- action learning
- participatory action research
- systems thinking
- inquiry process-facilitation, and
- process management

and all the associated constructivist methods such as:

- rural self-appraisal
- auto-ethnography
- appreciative inquiry
- most significant change
- open space technology, etc.

### *Article preparation*

New and first-time contributors are particularly encouraged to submit articles. A short piece (approx 500 words) can be emailed to the Editor, outlining your submission, with a view to developing a full article through a mentoring process. One of our reviewers will be invited to work with you to shape your article.

Journal articles may use either Australian/UK or USA spelling and should use Harvard style referencing. Visit [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard\\_style\\_\(referencing\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_style_(referencing)) for more.

### *Requirements*

Written contributions should contain:

- 1 ½ or double-spacing in all manuscripts, including references, notes, abstracts, quotations, figures and tables
- double quotation marks within single quotation marks to set off material that in the original source was enclosed in single quotation marks. Do not use quotation marks to enclose block quotations (any quotations of 40 or more words) and italicise block quotations
- Harvard style referencing
- maximum of 8000 words for peer reviewed articles and 2000 words for other journal items (including tables and figures)
- an abstract of 100-150 words
- six keywords for inclusion in metadata fields
- minimal use of headings (up to three is OK)
- any images or diagrams should be used to add value to the article and be independent from the document as either jpegs or gifs and inserted as image files into the page where possible. If using MS Word drawing tools, please 'group' your diagrams and images and anchor them to the page, or attach at the end of the document with a note in-text as to its position in the article.
- Note: if you are using photos of others you must have them give permission for the photos to be published. You should have written permission in these instances and forward such permission to the Editor.

On a cover sheet, please include contact information including full name, affiliation, email address, small photo (.jpeg or .gif) and brief biographical note.

- Please note: all correspondence will be directed to the lead author unless otherwise requested.

### *Peer review contributions*

All contributions for review should fit the following structure (only include those sections that are appropriate to your article):

- Title (concise and extended as required)

- Abstract and Keywords (100-150 words)
- Body of article – eg. introduction, background, literature review, main argument or research question, research methodology, research results, discussion, conclusions and future work (see formatting template)
- Useful links (if referring to weblinks, include these in full)
- Acknowledgements (about 100 words)
- Reference list (Harvard style)
- Appendices (use sparingly)
- Biographical notes of authors (up to 50 words)
- *Optional* small photo image of author(s) (.jpeg/ .jpg - no larger than 150 pixels)
- Please note: Those preferring a full peer review, must indicate as much to the editor at the commencement of writing, by email.

### *Editorial team*

ALARj is supported by a team of reviewers and is jointly published by ALARA Inc and Interchange and Prosperity Press. The ALARj publication is supported by the ALARA Publications Working Group, a team of ALARA members who share an interest in the development and progress of the journal and other ALARA publications.

### *Journal article review criteria*

The following criteria will be used by the Editorial review team to identify and manage the expectations of articles submitted for inclusion in the ALARj.

Articles submitted for inclusion in the journal should maintain an emphasis and focus of action research and action learning in such a way that promotes AR and AL as supported by ALARA members, and contributes to the literature more broadly.

Authors are sent a summary of reviewers' comments with which to refine their article.

The criteria are that articles submitted for inclusion in the ALARj:

- be both aimed at and grounded in the world of practice;
- be explicitly and actively participative: research with, for and by people rather than on people;

- draw on a wide range of ways of knowing (including intuitive, experiential, presentational as well as conceptual) and link these appropriately to form theory;
- address questions that are of significance to the flourishing of human community and the more-than-human world;
- aim to leave some lasting capacity amongst those involved, encompassing first, second and third person perspectives; and
- critically communicate the inquiry process instead of just presenting its results, and some reflections on it.

These overarching criteria should be considered together with the following questions:

- Is the article logical?
- Is it based on evidence? If so what kind?
- Does the article consider ethics?
- Has it considered the viewpoints of many stakeholders? Is it dialectical?
- Does the article consider the consequences for this generation and the next?
- Does it illustrate good practice in AR and AL?
- Does it progress AR and AL in the field (research, community, business, education or otherwise)?
- Does the writer present ideas with flare and creativity?
- Would the writer benefit from some mentoring to produce an article of journal-standard?

Upon final submission, authors are asked to sign an Agreement to Publish. For this, and more information about ALARA's publications, please visit <http://www.alara.net.au/publications>.