

Third Announcement!

Action Learning Action Research Association

Eighth ALARA World Congress

2010

Melbourne, Australia 6th – 9th September

Plus two pre-congress skill-sharing days (4th - 5th)

Presented by ALARA and The Institute of Development Studies
in partnership with Borderlands and oases Graduate School



Participatory Action Research and Action Learning:

Appreciating our Pasts

Comprehending our Presents

Prefiguring our Futures

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Invitation to the Eighth World Congress

Unlike many initiatives and approaches which appeared - seemingly - out of nowhere during the sixties and seventies, Participatory Action Research (PAR), Action Research (AR) and Action Learning (AL) not only survived but still flourishes; several generations of practitioners meanwhile have added their hearts', hands' and minds' work to the earlier traditions. Differentiations into 'applied fields'; journals and second and third editions of 'handbooks'; PAR, AR and AL epistemologies and ways of knowing and their methodologies and methods, all have become 'standard' fare in reference lists, workshops and course syllabi, all signs of a mature and, indeed, worldwide, evolving and maturing discourse.

With several of the originators of our 'movement' retiring or having passed away recently, we find ourselves *in the midst of a genuine transition period and it is time to take stock and spend some time carefully listening to one another across the generations*. We would do well to revisit the original impetuses which gave rise to PAR, AR and AL and critically examine what has happened after all that time. How have our approaches changed, together and in tune with the changing contexts we created and inhabit(ed)? Or indeed, *have* they changed? It is time to critically but appreciatively assess our present practices, understandings and ways of relating with the people we work with in our varied contexts; it is time to dream possible futures - an elemental task given the massive economic, ecological and social contextual changes and predicaments we seem to stand at the confluence of.

In the following pages, you will find a great deal of information about this exciting event, especially our ***first call for the submission of abstracts***, as we want to make sure that those of you who need institutional permission and apply for support can do so on the basis of a refereed and accepted abstract.

See the next page for further information.

We have tried to keep the Congress affordable. By early February we will be able to offer a fully detailed program with choices of hotels, billeting possibilities, pre-Congress skill-sharing opportunities and more. Meanwhile, please have a look at the ALARA website— www.alara.net.au —for more information or contact us at alara@borderlands.org.au 61 (0)3 9819 3239.

Hoping to hear from you soon and looking forward to see you in September!!!!

First Call for Abstracts

This *First Call for Abstracts* for proposed contributions to the Congress especially for those who need to apply for leave and for support from their respective institutions.

A *second* call for abstracts will go out *early February 2010*, together with a more detailed program, registration material including ‘*early bird*’ registration opportunities, discounted ALARA membership offers (for currently financial ALARA members intending to participate in the Congress) and more information about local practicalities, the Congress dinner, the pre-Congress skills development opportunities and more.

Given our *participatory* inclinations, we would like to spend much time in *practice-based, theme- or issue-focused and context-specific discussion and conversation*. Whilst creating sufficient space for plenary talks/panels and the presentation of formal papers, we are also looking forward to receiving proposals/abstracts for workshops, poster sessions or discussion groups based on brief ‘catalyst papers’ (see the ALARA website for a description of these). Presentation/discussion sessions at the Congress will normally be of 1 1/2 hours duration (for up to three paper presentations or a full workshop; poster sessions will be organised during lunch breaks).

The Organising Committee will receive abstracts for proposed contributions (up to 300-400 words) from interested individuals and groups till April 29th 2010.

Please email to alara@borderlands.org.au with ‘ALARA Congress Abstracts’ in the subject line; or contact us on 61 – (0)3 – 9819 3239 (ask for Jacques Boulet) for more information.

The abstracts will be reviewed by a team of carefully chosen peer-reviewers and, *normally*, intending participants/presenters will be informed about the acceptance (or otherwise) of their proposed contributions *at the latest by June 1st 2010*.

Those needing early confirmation about the acceptance (or otherwise) of their proposal/abstract should indicate this in an accompanying email/letter and we will do our best to process the review within two weeks of its receipt.

We plan to include *all* Congress contributions in a CD to go into the Congress ‘kit’ and will need all relevant materials by *July 31st 2010*. We are also discussing an additional refereeing process leading to the publication of a selection of papers/contributions after the Congress; the early-February program mail-out will offer more details about this, but it may be useful for intending contributors to keep this in mind.

The ALARA website - www.alara.net.au - will be regularly updated as to developments in the AR, AL and PAR ‘streams’ (see below) and the more general thematic developments as well as keynote and other presenters as they can be confirmed.

Key Themes of the Congress

In view of what we have said on the previous page, we envisage the Congress to combine a critical and reflective review of the philosophical foundations of PAR, AR and AL, with an appreciative look at present – and possibly future – concrete practices in their real-life contexts. The four key ‘themes’ or thematic areas— which evolved in discussions in the Organising Committee and with a wider circle of advisors—may assist in focusing our conversations and presentations at the Congress and may be helpful in shaping your contributions. A group of exciting international speakers will also assist us in setting the tone for each of the themes and we will soon be able to publicise all their details.

1. Addressing the *philosophical* foundations of action-based and participatory approaches to research and learning: is there a common and united philosophical basis across the various applied fields? Or, as PAR, AR and AL represent social change themselves, are variety and hybridity necessary characteristics of the work we do in its several rather distinctive practical and organisational contexts?

- What have been/are the (latest) developments in the philosophical underpinnings of our approaches?
- Ontology, epistemology, the value base in which we ground our knowledge and the recognition of the spiritual and relational dimension of our work: how can – and should we – reflectively and practically deepen and extend our understanding of these *AS* social change practice/praxis?
- How do other-than-western world views and the trans- and cross-cultural relationships which increasingly characterise our (post-) modern realities influence our practice/praxis?
- And should we not become more attentive to eco-philosophical and eco-ethical dimensions in and of our practice/praxis?

2. The theme of *power* and its uses, misuses and abuses in the learning and research relationship has – over time – been receiving varying degrees of attention, even if the ‘action’ and ‘participatory’ references would suggest dealing with power is of central concern in all aspects of our work.

- How is the theme of power – latently or openly - relevant in our practical work situations and contexts and how does it manifest in our working relationships?
- Talk about the ‘re-emergence’ of ‘class’ in industrialised societies and other persisting divisions in and across societies (gender, race, ability, state of ‘development’ etc) has again become more pronounced; do we take account of this in our AL, AR and PAR practice/praxis and if so, how?
- How does participatory practice/praxis link up with our democratic ideals and the possibility of ‘deliberative’ governance and the necessity of social change this would engender?
- How does the ‘politics’ of resource allocation, of money and of bureaucracies – state, NGO and corporate – influence or practice/praxis... for better or worse?

3. Perennial issues of *methodology* remain central to our deliberations and should continue to inspire participants in their planned presentation/workshop, including questions about quantitative/qualitative approaches and techniques, about their transformative nature within the context of AR, AL and PAR.

- What is the nature of the research/learning/consulting *relationship* in AL, AR and PAR?
- How do we evolve appropriate and collaborative processes in terms of timing (slow vs. fast-tracked), ethics, agreements about steps, etc?
- How do our use of language, our metaphors, especially in contexts characterised by deep divisions as mentioned above influence our practice/praxis and how can we ensure its transformative capacity?
- What are we to do with the results of our work...? How to negotiate ‘ownership’ of outcomes and the paradoxes between the commercial and the social/ethical? the so-called ‘private’ and so-called ‘public’?

4. ‘*Practice/Praxis*’ issues and stories about concrete experiences and examples of our ongoing work should, of course, receive ample attention; what have been the ‘pragmatics’ of process, of ‘means and ends’, of ‘experience-reflection-action’ in participants’ AL, AR, PAR work?

- What stories and case studies and novel/innovative moments can we share and offer for further consideration and inspiration?
- What have been contradictions-in-practice/praxis and how have they been dealt with in the concrete ‘situated context’ and what can be learned from this ‘beyond’ the concrete instance?
- Many AL, AR and PAR projects continuously touch upon issues of politics and policy; how have the connections been made and what have been the emerging issues?
- How can ‘*systems*’ approaches help with practical work within the AL, AR and PAR traditions?

Congress Program: the overall flow of conversations.

The above thematic foci and the associated presentations, workshops, catalytic statements, poster sessions and plenary sessions will be programmatically merged in the following overall ‘flow’ we have designed for the Congress.

DAY 1: Whose (and what) shoulders are we standing on?

The origins of AL, AR, PAR: what are our legacies, our sources, historical, philosophical, practical, both in general and in specific areas of application? Listening to and conversing about the foundations of the various participatory and action-based approaches to learning, researching, social change, organisational change, community and international development, welfare and health, the ecology and with certain groups of people, etc. What can and should newer and younger practitioners continue to learn from the elders in our various movements and how can we maintain and emulate the spirit of those who were then brave enough to try and make a difference... (and did it with vigour and much effect)?

DAYS 2 & 3: Our present(-s)

Where are we at today with AL, AR, PAR? The ‘*State(-s) of the Art(-s)*’ and how are we all contributing to and learning from today’s stories...? Two days of presenting and examining and reflecting on the present state (-s) of play(-s) with the second of those days organised by and spent in a location ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ of one of the several ‘streams’ of application of PAR, AL, AR, process/systems/organisational development/international and community development, etc.

Whilst the first of these two days would offer opportunities for plenary and panel presentations, workshops and inspired conversations and exchanges, during the second day, Congress participants will meet in various venues across the metropolitan area of Melbourne and home to institutions, organisations or agencies active in a particular field of application of our approaches. These ‘field-days’ will be organised by ‘clusters’ of members of groups and networks active in the particular ‘applied’ area and consist of plenary and workshop presentations, discussions, posters, etc, relevant and expressive of the particular directions PAR, AR and AL adopt in the respective field(-s). A huge opportunity to learn and reciprocally develop our skills ...!

DAY 4: Prefiguring:

How to grow and evolve PAR, AL and AR practice/praxis in the hazardous times we inhabit? We reflect about and explore questions of the next steps we should best take in the immediate future environments we co-create. How can we deliberately include up-and-coming generations of new practitioners and researchers and stay in conversation with ‘older’ generations? How to further develop the various approaches participants have shared during the previous three days and how to take them into our own ‘habitats’? Exploring the newly emerging ‘*eco*’ issues and what will the massive anticipated upheavals ‘do’ to social and global justice, social and ecological sustainability, ‘new/old’ forms and modalities of survival, micro- and macro-systems of (re-)production – from individuals, via families and communities to systems of ‘secondary sociality’: business and work/labour, education, health, recreation, etc. Finally, we should not forget that the struggle with the established positivist paradigm and its supporters and beneficiaries is not over yet...!

Venue

The Congress will be held at *Bayview Eden*, built around a beautiful late-1800s mansion, looking over Albert Park and all the way to Port Phillip Bay. The venue has many warm and welcoming ‘spaces’ for the main events, break-out rooms and places to sit and ‘be’ and converse. Catering and restaurants are on site, as well as a hotel for those who wish to stay at the venue. Situated at 6 Queens Road, Melbourne, it is less than 10 minutes tram from the city centre, adjacent by various large areas of parkland and it seems perfect for the World Congress next year...

Streams of Practice/Praxis

One way in which we hope to ‘hold together’ in creative tension the theories and practices/praxis of AL, AR and PAR is by creating ‘*streams of praxis*’ or fields on application. As mentioned, during the second and third days of the Congress – dedicated to looking at our present practice/praxis – we invite participants and presenters to share their understanding(-s) of and experiences in the various fields in which they work; in addition, the third day of proceedings will occur in venues ‘typical’ of the respective fields in which our approaches ‘occur’ and—hopefully—embody the social change we envisage to create.

Whilst ‘fields’ may be defined in various ways, we have opted for a pragmatic approach and have invited local and global practitioners to initiate and develop ‘*stream organising clusters*’, both to connect with the international networks operating in these fields, to seek sponsorships (possibly to invite keynote speakers for their stream) and, importantly, to help organise a program for the third day and their specific stream, including organising an appropriate venue. The organising group will assist these clusters with organising the array of practicalities. Another document is sent with this program announcement, outlining tasks and roles and other details useful for the organising of this third day of the Congress. Everyone is invited to contribute to the conceptual development of the ‘streams’ via a special section on ALARA website, rather than see these streams restricted to what is mentioned below. In subsequent announcements, participants and presenters will be kept informed of the final ‘shape’ the ‘streams of praxis’ will adopt during Congress proceedings.

So far, we have the beginnings of an ‘(social) *ecology* stream’, with several more specific foci; an ‘*education*’ stream is forming; several individuals are interested in ‘*development*’ including ‘*community*’, ‘*international*’ and ‘*personal*’ development; ‘*welfare, wellbeing and health*’ is another stream evolving; ‘*systems*’, ‘*organisational development*’, ‘*business*’ enjoy a strong interest from an established group of practitioners and there are moves to start an ‘*Indigenous Peoples and PAR*’ stream, possibly adding an ‘*inter-cultural*’ aspect to this stream. A concerted effort is made to have ‘stream clusters’ established and take on the various tasks detailed above as well as helping with marketing and generally spreading the news.

We encourage everyone interested in becoming involved in a ‘stream’ to get in touch with us and we will pass your details on to others and onto the website so you can start working towards your ‘very own’ program. At regular time intervals we will gather representatives of the ‘streams’ in Melbourne so as to harmonise and assists with the details of the organisation of the third Congress day!