

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

Like so 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) have come of age and several generations of practitioners have meanwhile added their hearts', hands' and minds' work to the earlier traditions. Differentiations into 'applied fields', journals and second and third editions of 'handbooks', its epistemologies and ways of knowing, its methodologies and methods have become 'standard' fare in reference lists, workshops and course syllabi and these are all signs of a mature and, indeed, worldwide discourse.

However, as several of the originators of our 'movement' are retiring or have passed away recently, it also *feels like we're involved in a genuine transition period and it seems time to take stock and listen to one another across the generations*. We need to remember the original impetuses and the responses PAR, AR and AL developed and critically examine what has happened with these responses; how have they changed over time, together and in tune with the changing contexts we created and inhabit(ed)? Or indeed, have they changed? It's time to critically but appreciatively assess our present practices, understandings and methodical ways of relating with the people we work with in our varied contexts and 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 wanted 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 all information in this regard.

We have been trying 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 write to us at alara@borderlands.org.au or contact us on 61 (0)3 9819 3239.

Hoping to hear from you and see you in September!!!!

First Call for Abstracts

We are launching a *First Call for Abstracts* for proposed contributions to the Congress (especially for those who need to apply for leave and for other support from their respective institutions).

A *second* call for abstracts will go out *early February 2010*, together with a further developed program, registration material including ‘*early bird*’ registration opportunities, discounted ALARA membership offers (for those participating in the Congress) and much more information about practicalities, the Congress dinner, the pre-Congress skills development opportunities, etc.

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 crating 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.

We will send the abstracts to a team of carefully chosen peer-reviewers, and, *normally*, will let intending participants/presenters know about the acceptance (or otherwise) of their proposed contributions 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 very best to process the refereeing 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’ and the more general thematic developments as well as keynote and other presenters as they can be confirmed.

Key Themes of the Congress

We envisage the Congress to combine a critical and reflective ‘genealogical’ look at our philosophical foundations 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 out of discussions in the Organising Committee and with a wider circle of advisors—may assist in focusing our conversations and presentations and may help in shaping your planned contributions (see “*Invitation to submit Early Abstracts*” above). We also have invited a set of international speakers to help us set the tone for each of the themes and we will soon be able to tell you who they are.

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 should we rather accept variety and hybridity as 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 the influence of these on our practice?
- How do (and should?) other-than-western world views and the trans- and cross-cultural relationships which increasingly characterise our (post-) modern realities influence our practice?
- And should we not become more attentive to eco-philosophical and eco-ethical dimensions in and of our practice?

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 the theme is central in our work.
 - How is the theme of power – latently or openly - relevant in our practical work situations and how does it manifest in our working relationships?
 - Some authors talk about the re-emergence of ‘class’ in industrialised societies and many see the persistence of other divisions in societies along gender, race, ability, state of ‘development’ and other lines; how do we take account of this reality in our approaches to AL, AR and PAR?
 - How does participatory practice link up with our democratic ideals and the possibility of ‘deliberative’ governance?
 - How does the ‘politics’ of resource allocation, of money and of bureaucracies – state, NGO and corporate – influence or work... for better or worse?
3. Perennial issues of *methodology* should remain central to our deliberations and will hopefully inspire participants in their planned presentation/workshop; how relevant remain questions about quantitative and qualitative approaches, their associated techniques and methods within the context of AR and PAR?
 - What is the nature of the research/learning/consulting *relationship* in AL, AR and PAR?
 - How do we evolve an appropriate process, in terms of timing (slow vs. fast-tracked) ethics, agreements about steps, etc?
 - What are issues surrounding our use of language, our metaphors, especially in contexts characterised by deep divisions as mentioned above?
 - 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? Between the so-called ‘private’ and the so-called ‘public’?
4. ‘*Practice*’ 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?
 - What have been contradictions-in-practice and how have they been dealt with in the concrete ‘situated context’ and what can be learned from this ‘beyond’ the concrete instance?
 - any 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 specifications and the various opportunities for presentations, workshops, poster sessions and plenaries (for which we have already invited four exciting international speakers!) will then be ‘inserted’ 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, certain groups of people, etc. What can and should newer and younger practitioners still learn from the elders in our various movements how can we maintain and emulate the spirit of those who were then brave enough to try and make a difference... and did with vigour and much effect!

DAYS 2 & 3: Our present(s)

Where are we at today with AL, AR, PAR? The ‘States of the Arts’ 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, 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, on 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 PAR, AR, AL. These ‘field-days’ will be organised by local groups and networks active in the particular ‘applied’ field and will consist of plenary and workshop presentations, demonstrations, posters, whatever seems relevant and expressive of the particular directions PAR, AR and AL take in the respective field(s). A huge opportunity to learn and develop our skills reciprocally...!

DAY 4: Prefiguring:

How to grow and evolve PAR, AL and AR 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’ environments and what we imagine the massive anticipated upheavals will ‘do’ to issues like 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. And, finally, we would do best to 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 woody 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, surrounded by parkland and it seems perfect for the World Congress next year...

Streams of Praxis

Simultaneously and in addition, through the formation of ‘applied streams’ of AL, AR and PAR, we intend to assist participants and presenters to focus their contributions onto the practicalities and concrete contexts through which our various approaches ‘become real’. As you will be able to see below, during the second and third days of the Congress – dedicated to looking at our ‘presents’ – we intend to share our understanding(s) of and experiences in the various fields in which we work, with the third day of proceedings occurring in venues ‘typical’ of the respective fields in which AL, AR, PAR ‘occur’.

Whilst ‘fields’ may be defined in various ways, we have opted for a pragmatic approach and have invited local practitioners to initiate and develop ‘***stream organising clusters***’, both to connect with the international networks of practitioners operating in these fields, to seek sponsorships (possibly to invite keynote speakers for their stream) and, importantly, to help organise a program specifically for the third day and their specific stream, including organising an appropriate venue. 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.

At present, we have the beginnings of an “AL, AR and PAR and the ‘***ecology***’ stream”, with more specific foci on agriculture, water, energy and mining and on wilderness; an ‘***education***’ stream is forming; several individuals are interested in ***community development*** and ***international development***; ‘***welfare and health***’ is another stream evolving; ‘***systems***’, ***organisational development***, ‘***business***’ and AL, AR and PAR has strong interest from a group of members of ANZsys and several individuals have already expressed interested in an ‘***Indigenous Peoples and PAR***’ stream. There is a concerted effort being made to have ‘stream clusters’ established very soon 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 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!