



## Evaluation of the ALARA 2010 World Congress

The following evaluation is based on written feedback from participants at the close of the World Congress.

### **What was the one, most significant learning outcome for you from your experience at the ALARA World Congress?**

- ***Expanded knowledge of action research, action learning and participatory action research (60% of comments).***

The Congress gave people an appreciation of action research, extending and challenging their knowledge. It showed them what was happening in various settings and in the interface between contexts such as international development, community development, environment and systemic AR. It built people's confidence.

"Action research is a very rich, adaptable, flexible and creative approach to research"

"An excellent way for researchers and students to learn what participatory action research is"

"It was good to hear the variety of ways in which people were using action research."

"Confirming PAR practice" .... "I am already practising AR." .... "We speak same language!!"

"Experiencing what action research 'looks like' in how people talk, think, interact."

### **Other themes**

- ***Opportunities to build relationships and explore new ideas.***

"Time to talk with and listen to extraordinary people who generate enthusiasm and new ideas"

"Meet the elders."

"Useful contacts with similar experiences that we shall continue with conversations together."

"Connecting with people asking similar questions."

- ***Opportunities for reflection.***

"Deep, deep reflections and my renewed commitment to change."

"Another (re)visioning, (re)affirmation I.e. inclusivity"

- ***Reflecting on own praxis***

"The importance of keeping close to 'grass roots' actions researchers when one works in a university."

"Looking at methodology as a process of reflexive praxis."

### **What two or three things about the Congress contributed most to your learning?**

- ***Interaction with fellow action researchers (30% of comments).***

Participants really appreciated the opportunity to interact at depth with fellow action researchers. The workshops allowed this, and discussion after presentations. The off-site meetings on Day Three deepened the intimacy between people.

"Small groups - the streams that allowed sharing of things in similar areas."

*"Workshop formats that encouraged sharing."*

"The stream venue day was great for newcomers to interact in a smaller group."

- **The atmosphere of shared learning** (19%).

People were willing to share their experience and learning from each other. The openness of presenters and plenary speakers encouraged this, as did having breathing space in the program.

"Great like minded people."

*"Informal discussions with like-minded people."*

"We talked and reflected a lot and that enhanced our learning."

- **The diversity of people and perspectives** (19%).

Having people with many different experiences, but with a similar interests in people and change was enriching and heart-warming. There was a chance to make new connections with people. The strong presence of indigenous peoples was appreciated.

"The variety and richness of people's experiences."

*"Knowing more like minded people and have deep dialogue; aware of common language and common concerns in different cultural contexts; established network for further conversation."*

- **The keynote speakers** (16% mentions)

. The keynote speakers were inspiring and challenging. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's presentation

"Great speakers."

*"Stimulating keynotes stretched my thinking."*

- **The generous spirit in the organisation of the Congress** (16% mentions).

People felt the generosity in the design of the Congress, with its different sessions, venues and breathing spaces. They felt welcomed by the organisers.

"The generous, welcoming spirit of Borderlands esp Jacques and Mish."

*"Variation of pace and content."*

"Time for reflection; billeting, and the option of staying."

## **What two or three things about the Congress most hindered your learning?**

- **Too much presentation, not enough active learning.** (24% of comments)

There was too much presentation in the program as a whole, and not enough activity where people were interacting in shared learning.

"Papers, papers, papers - NO MORE! Lack of adequate integrative, reflexive engagement in plenary."

*"Workshops could have been more participatory and focused on few key questions."*

"Too many presentations, too few opportunities initially for just meeting people and sharing."

- **Not enough discussion in the presentation sessions.** (18%)

People wanted more time for discussion of presentations. What discussion there was focused on the presentation and the presenter, not what the presentation meant to people in their own work and life, and

what the issues raised meant in a wider context. There wasn't enough time to connect to what others thought and to develop understandings as a group.

"Needed more discussion that was meaningful in the sessions; needed more depth; needed less 'structure' i.e. Presentation. Questions? Next!"

*"... tendency in most sessions - probably because of time - for question time to be largely questioner-presenter interaction rather than a dialogue between attendees."*

"Too many papers per session - 2 rather than 3 might facilitate deeper exploration and more breathing space."

- **Too academic.** (14%)

Some people found the language too academic or felt themselves positioned as outsiders.

"The language sometimes used was exclusive e.g. academic intellectual, expert. This makes for an elitist stance."

*"Some over zealous 'old time' gurus in AR who made the newcomers feel a little naïve and out of place."*

- **The venue..** (14%)

Many of the spaces were enclosed. It sometimes hard to hear, especially in plenary sessions where there wasn't a microphone for questions from the floor. The café and breakout areas were crowded, with not enough room to sit and talk, or sit on the floor. The name tags were hard to read. There was only tea and coffee to drink.

"Being in almost totally 'enclosed' spaces with no natural light screws my head up. A couple of time being involved in group discussion close to another group - hard to hear."

*"We probably would have done with PA systems. It was hard for people to use natural voice projection."*

- **Glitches in the program.** (14%)

People weren't told of changes to venues for sessions, or speakers didn't show up. There wasn't enough information in the program to make an informed choice of sessions. Sometimes session chairs weren't present.

"Timetable/sessions became a bit 'messy' in the organisation on last afternoon as chairs not present."

*"Not announcing cancellations and changes to program."*

- **Not starting on time and not keeping to time.** (8%)

When sessions didn't keep to time, discussion time was cut, other presenters were pushed back, the next set of participants had to wait, and people couldn't move between sessions to pick up specific presentations.

*"(1) From 9am Monday we ran behind time which means (2) shortened papers and shortened discussion which mean (3) more superficial conversations."*

- **The days were long.** (8%).

For some, the days were too long, and fatigue hindered their learning.

*"My own health problem – fatigue."*