

**From Theory to Practice; Context in Praxis**  
Proceedings of ALARA's 8th Action Learning, Action Research and  
12th Participatory Action Research 2010 World Congress

**Preface**

**Susan Goff**

And so here you are, with us, as you read our words. Thank you for joining us.

The world around, within and of us is being ever more demanding in how it is to be known. The dynamics that play into such knowings ever more enlivening, threatening, mischievous and needy of our attentions... It is 2013, the ALARA World Congress is already a past event and while we know humanity has always been at precipitous edges, and for that we can be grateful for pre-existing wisdoms, we may also be of a shared mind that the multiplicity and intensities of the edges on which we find ourselves today, are unique in the time of our collective self.

As a Western action researcher, I first became aware of the language of “edges” when working in the UK some fifteen years ago, which is only to say that the discourse on “edges” is well established. At that time, the term described the often-felt gap, or “space”, of not knowing that comes about when two or more disciplines come together in ways that are new. The interplay is dynamic giving rise to concepts, practices, legacies even, that have to that moment not been seen before (or seen in this context, before). In Western terms, these are ontological questions related to what there is to be known, as it comes into view.

A mainstream example of edges coming into view, and the transformative outcomes that they can create, is the formation of the field of “eco-health” in the 1990s. Ecology and population health scientists came together with planners and a variety of other professions, to create a new field of study into how changes in natural systems affect human health. For this confluence to happen the participants used participatory, systemic and transdisciplinary inquiry practices (such as action research). This field is now well established, as is the use of action research in its progress (<http://www.ecohealth.net>). This transdisciplinary development has led to the further initiation of several regional and global networks, a global effort to reconceptualise health and environment in a manner that better serves the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and contributions to achieving the United Nations’ Millennium Goals. If we return to our reflections on “edges”, the edge or step-off point that was emerging in this example was the ontological space between the two fields of health and ecological sciences, creating a third, unfamiliar and dynamic field in their association which came to be known as “eco-health”.

The conversation on edges goes deeper, when in cross-cultural spaces the discourses between knowledge systems is not contained within western philosophies that presume discipline-structured approaches to ontology. These are epistemological questions, of how, or by what means, we are to know something. Our culturally distinctive backgrounds, including Western ones, consciously and unconsciously inform us of the traditions of ways of knowing. If we need to experience and formalise culturally different ways of knowing within our inquiry, then we are at another “edge”. As we encounter different cultures of knowing, we might think our being within an “inter” or even “trans-ontological” space. Australian Aboriginal peoples, for example, have developed such a way of knowing as a means of surviving colonisation.

In such a space, sometimes held in very fragile social systems, we might turn to find that we have to make our own way, as action learners and action researchers, self-crafting forms of practical integrity in the transparent company of those with whom we travel. Every practitioner has their unique way of visualising and negotiating, conjuring even, the edges, spaces, boundaries and pathways we take – or which take us - into these new worlds. We fashion familiar and unique expressions of action research and action learning as we go.

This selection of papers from the 8<sup>th</sup> ALARA World Congress (and 10<sup>th</sup> Participatory Action Research Congress) that took place in Melbourne, Australia, in 2010 is a precise account of how the world’s action learning and action research practitioners are responding to the edges in research and learning practices, as well as the substantive matters to which their inquiries contribute. As a reflection on practice, each chapter is an account of how our practitioners

encounter knowledge system edges and spaces, call on aspects of theory, mediate with the priorities of co-participants, and contribute their own unfolding as a human being that such activities provoke within us, to craft insights and practice outcomes.

Because of the most evident pressures that our ways of knowing are producing in the world, many of which are addressed within this publication, as citizens and as practitioners, we are finding ourselves at new edges for the benefit of a future so close it can barely be called such. How do we step off? How do we create firm ground when the ground we can see is so alien to us? What are the ethics of self-care and care of each other here? And what do the traditions of action research and action learning need to do to guide us all across these thresholds?

The World Congress was an event that continued ALARA's twenty-year tradition of persistence with global gatherings and as with all previous Congresses, took our gathering into a new mode of expression. We celebrated the maturity of our field with old friends and pioneers, we welcomed new friends with equally significant legacies from other domains into our midst and we discovered a new generation of practitioners standing on the shoulders of those who had gone before, as they explore action research and action learning for the first time. Due to the honourable legacies of our co-hosting partner, the Borderlands Co-operative (Melbourne), the Congress themes accommodated our traditions in Education and Learning, Health and Wellbeing, and International Community Development, saw the return of Feminist Action Research and also encountered three new streams: Decolonising Praxis, Social Ecology, and Systems Practices.

Presentations, experimental workshops, agreements about excellence in praxis and innumerable conversations in buses and trams, around bars, in corridors and stairwells threaded the interconnections together. The Congress's particular combination of themes was given additional relevance by the presence of the Wurundjeri Nation's esteemed Elders, our most valued sponsors, AusAID and the Institute of Development Studies (UK), and the participants they sponsored, all of whom brought to us experience of settings in both Australia and beyond, that most assuredly defined to our collective gaze the nature of the edges on which we stand.

In working with the papers that the authors contributed to this publication however, something other than a replication of Congress themes as a way of ordering the texts, became apparent. Partly, this was a practical response to a problem as some themes produced more papers for publication than others: applying the Congress streams as ordering categories for the publication's structure would have resulted in an imbalanced reflection of the world that came into view at the Congress. Partly, it is an interest, indeed a need as I see it, to move beyond discipline-based approaches in how we recognise our field, to consciously acknowledge and embrace transdisciplinarity as a useful governing distinction in knowing our field of practice. In this publication, the authors have each endorsed this editorial approach and we bring to you, our reader, a feeling for this essential competency whose time has surely come.

Complex contexts require systemic, integrated and dynamic ways of knowing, being, relating and doing. Transdisciplinarity is a way in which we can develop capabilities that both sustain relevant traditions of knowledge-work, while also enabling a manifestation of entities to emerge from combinations of such traditions and entirely unexpected new players.

In the latter case, a different source of constancy in the face of sharpened uncertainty may be needed to that which conventional research, even conventional action research, may require. Such a source of constancy may be the relationships between practitioners, it may be the presence of Elders, the context (however that is understood) in which the practitioners work, it may be a new technology, or an agreed set of principles, for example. This publication carries narratives of all these approaches to uncertainty and many more, each evoking the need for transdisciplinary skills to be hard at work in the field: Self Critical Reflexivity, Hermeneutics, Action Learning and Eco-Systems Mapping to name but four such skills.

In consideration of seeking the right forms of stability in the face of uncertainty, this collection of works is organised in a manner that allows an unfurling from one proposition, which concludes at another. We begin the text with authors who encounter action research and action learning moments with well established, theoretical stances, and we conclude our study with authors who

purposefully practice with no such clarity and determination. The former enables the context of inquiry to come into view through a strong theoretical perspective. The latter enables context to determine methodology, method, practice and outcomes. Each approach, and the many nuanced variations between these two distinctions, brings some insight into the innate character of the practitioners and their backgrounds, each brings ongoing dilemmas of approach. Transdisciplinarity is a way in which we can understand and meet such challenges to personhood, and the dilemmas of systemic change that the work creates.

Each chapter, while located within a specific discipline, context and/or question is a transition into the next as we flow from high definition theory, to no definition theory, then on to reconstructions of theory in practice (praxis) by contextual means. The questions and experiences of power that these different approaches bring are a constant preoccupation for most of the authors. It is not that one approach is more ethical than another, but one of the 8<sup>th</sup> ALARA World Congress's legacies is that as practitioners of action learning and action research, we now know that every inquiry situation we encounter raises to the practitioner's attention the dilemma of either working with pre-determined methodology or letting context co-design methodology and its practice with us. The Congress has encouraged us to find ways to work the questions of power that arrive with our decisions. With this field-based text, ALARA shares understanding of this dilemma with all who practice in such edge-spaces.

To assist us with these core concerns and particularly those related to power, our publication concludes with a series of considerations on ethics, appropriate to the special characteristics of action research and action learning and the many variants that these schools of praxis have birthed and that they also receive.

My hope is that you will greatly enjoy the specifics of each story, some of which will be closer to your immediate interests than others and that you will also travel with the imperative questions that the world is asking of us through this publication to less familiar places, as we stand together and step beyond our edge to reveal the strong ground of our field as it comes into view here and now.

I now offer to you an overview of each chapter in sequence, endorsed by the authors, and accompanied by their biographical details.

## **Orientation**

### *Taryn Lane: Interlude praxis*

Our opening piece is a narrative, locating the reader in Taryn's stance as a live action learner as she encounters moments in the World Congress across each of the four days. True to auto ethnographic form, Taryn describes an encounter, her way of being and acting within it, and how her thinking (including memories and associations) enlivens new questions within her, which she shares with the peoples she encounters. She recreates the pathway from edges and spaces into resting places and then on to more questions, as she walks through the Congress. In so doing, Taryn gives us a reading of what it was like for her to be at the event, so we can contextualise the following chapters in this place and time.

#### Biographical details

Taryn Lane

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [akin.lane@gmail.com](mailto:akin.lane@gmail.com)

## Chapters

### 1 *Ernie Stringer and Shelia Baldwin - Linking teaching, learning and action research in K-12 classrooms for effective instruction*

Ernie and Shelia describe how they integrate a clearly defined and pre-determined construct of action learning with action research to enable both teachers and students to create learning environments that value students' worlds, and also value how they make sense of them, while introducing them to new experiences. They use two cases, one in urban USA and the other in remote Aboriginal Australia. This chapter simply and clearly lays out the use of action learning and action research in teaching environments. The authors show the efficacy of this model in very different cultural contexts and yet producing the same satisfying outcomes of energised students and teachers. This chapter clearly shows the value of a pre-existing methodology applied to a context so that it creates the intended situation-improvement.

#### Biographical details

Shelia Baldwin

Title: PhD

Organisational affiliation: Monmouth University, West Long Branch, New Jersey

Country of residence: USA

Email: [sbaldwin@monmouth.edu](mailto:sbaldwin@monmouth.edu)

Ernie Stringer

Title: PhD

Organisational affiliation: Curtin University

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [erniestranger@hotmail.com](mailto:erniestranger@hotmail.com)

### 2 *Karen Crinall, Debra Manning, Marie Feeley and Audra Glavas - "The power of pyjamas": Everything affects everything else: power, perception and hidden forms of restrictive practice in shared supported accommodation*

"The power of pyjamas" is the power of people with disabilities to push against obvious and subtle restrictive interventions by service providers in rural Victoria, Australia. Participatory action research was used to enable the client group to become co-researchers with the service providers in the identification of such strictures and their being overcome, together. This chapter focuses directly on the construct of power, power as enabling, rather than oppressive. This question was encountered both in the research focus and its methodology. Additionally participants used a (transdisciplinary) conceptual tool of Ecological Systems Maps to track their relationships and the qualities of power within them. Karen, Debra, Marie and Audra demonstrate the agency of strong practice theory to make visible, that which previously was invisible. Here, precision of research practice theory clarifies the difficulty and complexity of the subject matter.

#### Biographical details

Karen Crinall

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: Monash University

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [karen.crinall@monash.edu](mailto:karen.crinall@monash.edu)

Debra Manning

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: Monash University

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [debra.manning@monash.edu](mailto:debra.manning@monash.edu)

Marie Ellen Feeley  
Organisational affiliation: Department of Human Services  
Country of residence: Australia  
Email: [marie.feeley@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:marie.feeley@dhs.vic.gov.au)

Audra Glavas  
Title: Counsellor  
Organisational affiliation: Monash University  
Country of residence: Australia  
Email: [audra.glavas@monash.edu](mailto:audra.glavas@monash.edu)

### 3 *Zhanna Kremez - Implementing organisational change in the context of international franchising: An action research case study*

Zhanna locates her action research in the task of translating an Australian medical practice business model (franchising) into a Russian field of application, with the purpose of providing early diagnosis orthodontic services to children while also educating parents about preventative orthodontic treatment. Zhanna uses a qualitative and data-driven approach to data collection and analysis grounded in practice to identify critical incidents, which in turn, guide her changes to praxis in remote and also direct facilitation settings. In Zhanna's hands this approach had the effect of stabilising the research method so that the business model could undergo modification. Action research also enabled Zhanna to adapt her thinking. This account is highly innovative for its selection and use of variants of action research and elements within them, to augment the power of those who would be impacted by the translation of the model (business investors and their clients - children and parents). In this narrative the theories of action research practice govern the mediation between concept and context of practice.

#### Biographical details

Zhanna Kremez  
Organisational affiliation: Griffith University  
Country of residence: Australia  
Email: [zhanna.kremez@griffithuni.edu.au](mailto:zhanna.kremez@griffithuni.edu.au)

### 4 *Ruth Kiraka - Teaching by case method: using action research to enhance student participation*

Located in Kenya, this chapter considers the use of Case Study methods to increase student participation in tertiary education. The research used participatory and collaborative action research approaches to better understand student behaviour and teaching practices. This approach was valued for being both appropriate to meeting the students' needs while also being ethical in its ability to enable professional and personal self-development. Ruth reports the results of student and teacher findings regarding the reasons why participation is low or high. In this chapter the context is known through the methodology, which is applied with careful consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of participatory and case methods. The focus is on the research results rather than the methodology, which draws our attention to the balance that must be encountered between methodologies, structural change and learning outcomes, when separation between these elements exists.

#### Biographical details

Ruth Njoki Kiraka  
Title: Associate Professor  
Organisational affiliation: Strathmore University, Nairobi  
Country of residence: Kenya  
Email: [rkiraka@strathmore.edu](mailto:rkiraka@strathmore.edu)

5 *Linda Kurti, Anna Whelan, Anthony Zwi and John Deane - Finding balance in a faith-based international development agency: A cooperative inquiry*

Over two decades, an Australian Christian faith-based organisation increasingly engaged with government in delivering international aid, in this case, in Papua New Guinea. This development challenged the organisation's identity as a faith-based rather than a secular organisation. Linda, Anna, Anthony and John describe how this core disturbance was responded to, by using cooperative action research to explore how to be true to the felt sense of organisational identity. The authors inquire into founding organisational assumptions over three cycles of inquiry. In so doing, a threatening fracture of identity could be understood very deeply, with the associated difficulties and exhilarations able to be recognised and included in the unfolding changes. The inquiry informed significant decisions affecting structure, human resources and programme management approaches. The skills of Reflective Learning became a part of organisational life recognised in leadership positions. This chapter shows the full narrative from theory, to praxis, to clearly identified and resulting change that disciplined practice of the methodology enabled.

Biographical details

Linda Kurti

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: Director of Public Policy, Urbis

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [lkurti@urbis.com.au](mailto:lkurti@urbis.com.au)

Anna Klinken Whelan

Title: Adjunct Associate Professor

Organisational affiliation: University of New South Wales

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [annakwhelan@gmail.com](mailto:annakwhelan@gmail.com)

Anthony B Zwi

Title: Professor of Global Health and Development

Organisational affiliation: School of Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [a.zwi@unsw.edu.au](mailto:a.zwi@unsw.edu.au)

John Deane

Title: The Reverend

Organisational affiliation: Executive Director, Anglican Board of Mission – Australia Ltd

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [executivedirector@abm.asn.au](mailto:executivedirector@abm.asn.au)

6 *Steve Jordan, Christine Stocek and Rodney Mark - Doing participatory evaluation in an Indigenous context: Methodological issues and questions*

Steve, Christine and Rodney describe a Participatory Evaluation project to evaluate an after-school area program developed in response to the (Cree Nation) Wemindji's concerns about their young people. This chapter describes the development of a program that addresses ongoing impacts of colonisation in the Canadian Indigenous context. It shows how Participatory Evaluation is preferred, because it actively critiques top down, neo-liberal approaches to evaluation and enables participants to determine the values with which a program is to be judged and developed – those values also being primary in their ongoing community lives. The authors argue for Participatory Evaluation to be located within the participatory action research array of modalities and methodologies. Steve, Christine and Rodney ably hold the mediating space between everyday local community life and the development of a formal methodology to most appropriately support and improve that life from the very elements of the life itself.

### Biographical details

Rodney Mark

Title: Chief

Organisational affiliation: Cree Nation of Wemindji

Country of residence: Canada

Email: [chief@wemindji.ca](mailto:chief@wemindji.ca)

Christine Mary Stocek

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: Concordia University

Country of residence: Canada

Email: [christine.stocek@concordia.ca](mailto:christine.stocek@concordia.ca)

Steve Jordan

Organisational affiliation: McGill University

Country of residence: Canada

## 7 *Les Vozzo, Phil Nanlohy, Colin Webb, Diana Whitton and Crighton Nichols - From Bankstown to Jigalong and Yirrkala: Supporting pre-service teachers in the deployment of XO laptops*

Introducing new technology to remote community schools in Australia is a complex task. In this chapter, Les, Phil, Colin, Dianna and Crighton describe the journey of working with a university and a service provider in three Northern Territory communities. Using action learning they work out the best way to go about introducing new technologies to culturally strong and also vulnerable communities, including the communities' teachers, parents and children in the inquiry. Questions as well as insights about the impacts of introducing the technology are raised, with regard to both the communities' and the team's encounters with the technology. In this chapter we witness the rare opportunity of a team of action learners letting the context in which they are working have primary voice including qualities such as the uncontrollable, the unknowable, and the distinctions of "coming to know" that a new context shows of itself to those living within it, in the presence of outsiders. The team uses action learning but does not attempt a linear cyclical approach so much as focuses on the importance of Hermeneutics as the permeable system boundary. The reader is drawn with the writers, into the very considerable challenges of the task at hand. Learning outcomes are identified and theorisation of what is required for more effective service learning projects is offered. This chapter foregrounds a soft approach to praxis allowing the team members and participants in the initiative to come to terms with the intervention and identify for themselves, the issues that need to be addressed.

### Biographical details

Dr Les Vozzo

Title: AREP Education Course Advisor – Senior Lecturer

Organisational affiliation: University of Western Sydney

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [l.vozzo@uws.edu.au](mailto:l.vozzo@uws.edu.au)

Phil Nanlohy

Title: Lecturer in Pedagogy and ICT Education

Organisational affiliation: University of Western Sydney

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [p.nanlohy@uws.edu.au](mailto:p.nanlohy@uws.edu.au)

Colin Webb

Title: Lecturer in Science and Technology

Organisational affiliation: University of Western Sydney

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [c.webb@uws.edu.au](mailto:c.webb@uws.edu.au)

Diana Whitton

Title: Associate Professor

Organisational affiliation: University of Western Sydney

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [diana.whitton@uws.edu.au](mailto:diana.whitton@uws.edu.au)

Crighton Nichols

Title: Director of Technology Platforms

Organisational affiliation: EducarUno

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [crighton.nichols@gmail.com](mailto:crighton.nichols@gmail.com)

8 *Helen Kambouridis - Using Cooperative Inquiry and participatory action research with therapists in the Victorian sexual assault field to better deliver services to families who have experienced sibling sexual abuse*

The case described in this chapter focuses on the need of Australian-based therapists working with Sibling Sexual Assault to come together to reflect on their experiences, their practices, and the questions that come to them, usually in professional isolation. The intention is that using Cooperative Inquiry will contribute to collaborative work with families. Helen lets the reflective, inquiry and collaborative practices support the group of therapists to travel their own journey into new peer ground, while also tracking her own inquiry questions and steps. This included using Discourse Analysis to consider the language used in the public domain to discuss Sibling Sexual Assault. She brings the results of this study back to the group to assist with their own critical reflections on how the issues are addressed and implications for their own stances. Helen shows Cooperative Inquiry enabling the transdisciplinary skills of Self-Reflexivity to emerge as a primary means of relationship building and professional practice development. The group chose a methodology that was comfortable to their preferred ways of working, to provide the optimum conditions of a most difficult arena for reflexivity.

Biographical details

Helen Kambouridis

Title: PhD Candidate; Psychologist

Organisational affiliation: La Trobe University, Bouverie Centre; Gatehouse Central Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [helen.kambouridis@rch.org.au](mailto:helen.kambouridis@rch.org.au)

9 *Marie McEntee - More carrot and less stick: Lessons from agricultural extension in New Zealand*

Marie's chapter considers agricultural extension and the extent to which Social and Collaborative Learning is needed to meet economic goals and productivity. In particular, the interface between science and the agricultural sector in various project environments is used to detail the value of Social Learning in this context. While participatory learning approaches are encouraged - they are still poorly understood particularly by funding bodies and policy makers in this context. The value of collaborative learning is detailed through many different voices and windows of implementation. The core concern with environmental sustainability underpins each project window. The natures of collaborative learning and participatory approaches are taken as a given and what is under investigation is that, despite the rhetoric, they are absent. In reference to our rising discourse on transdisciplinarity, this chapter marks the mid point of our journey from clearly defined theory of practice to contextually determined praxis because it describes the lack of methodology and what happens (or cannot happen) in this absence. While a lack of understanding of action learning and action research and continual problems with the resourcing of participatory approaches in any area of implementation is not unfamiliar to

practitioners, this paper provides strong and useful arguments for this situation to be changed when the impact of their absence is taken into account.

#### Biographical details

Marie McEntee

Title: PhD Candidate

Organisational affiliation: School of Environment, The University of Auckland

Country: New Zealand

Email: [m.mcentee@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:m.mcentee@auckland.ac.nz)

#### 10 *Tony O'Connor - How can patient involvement and leadership further contribute to health service design?*

Locating his inquiry in the field of health in New Zealand, Tony reports on the workshop he offered at ALARA's 2010 World Congress, which explored Waterman *et al's* (2001) questions about the nature of action research. Tony documents the workshop participants' responses, then goes on to reflect on their implications for encouraging patient participation in health service design. Tony uses a method of interrogating the quality of action research to present to us insights about the way participatory action research can be recognised, even if it is not named (the reverse situation to our previous chapter). The analysis takes into account the necessity of disallowing a "gold standard" in order to enable the dynamism of participation and context to drive change. This paper enables us to see action research coming into view in the context of participation, through a practice of questioning, group discourse and reflection entirely consistent with the methodology. A delicate balancing between what it is, what it can be, and what it is not it brings us from a reflection on an absence of action research in the previous chapter, to one that lets us see action research coming into view.

#### Biographical details

Tony O'Connor

Title: PhD

Organisational affiliation: Auckland District Health Board

Country: New Zealand

Email: [TonyO@adhb.govt.nz](mailto:TonyO@adhb.govt.nz)

#### 11 *Jane Abbiss - Shifting conceptualisations of knowledge in teacher education: Collaborative research, partnership and power*

Jane's reflections in the merging of two academic institutions concerned with teaching practices are drawn from her work in education in New Zealand. The chapter is not about the findings, but about the methodology that emerged in collegial discussions about the nature of knowledge, education, learning and pedagogy to enable partnership to develop through the merger. In this inquiry Jane is focussed on describing the emergence of meta-level conversations, which came through a particular arrangement of resources for inquiry including case studies and organised research activities such as questionnaires, mentoring and professional conversations. A conscious decision was made not to refer to a predetermined research method, including action research, as this was felt to under-value the participation of those involved. What emerged was a discourse on power between the researchers and the advisors who were participant researchers in the study. The chapter recognises the different tensions and concludes that the role of Critical Friend and the skills of Self-Critical Reflexivity are crucially important to redress power relationships in teacher education research.

#### Biographical details

Jane Abbiss

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: School of Teacher Education, College of Education, University of Canterbury

Country of residence: New Zealand  
Email: [jane.abbiss@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jane.abbiss@canterbury.ac.nz)

12 *Peter Westoby - Reflections on community-based action learning with Vanuatu leaders: Building capacity for sustainable peace-building*

Working with government and community leadership in Vanuatu Peter and his team provide a sustained conversation space about issues that were rarely resourced for reflection and exchange in the working day. Pausing to describe some of the new thinking that the interactions produced, Peter considers the theories of practice that the team used to create them. Peter places before us transdisciplinary skills such as experiential, elicitive, dialogical and participatory methodologies operating in specific modes of engagement (such as Participatory Curriculum Design). He notes that these approaches are born from a partnership with several local organisations, Chiefs and other community members. Using local language such as “storians” to describe action-learning events is an embodiment of honouring customary practices and the powers within them, while also incorporating imported practices and the powers within them, with the consent of local leadership. Peter takes us into a core pace of praxis issues, the questions of power, the power of questions and the experiences of facilitation in the meeting of methodology with living systems in cross-cultural contexts.

Biographical details

Peter Westoby

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: Senior Lecturer in Community Development, Community Development Unit, The University of Queensland, Australia; and Research Fellow, Centre for Development Support, The University of Free State, South Africa

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [p.westoby@uq.edu.au](mailto:p.westoby@uq.edu.au)

13 *Karen Caister, Mark Dent and Maryann Green - “I see it and it matters”:* Grounded Theory embedded in participatory action research

As an inspiring extension of the relationship between Grounded Theory and action research, Karen’s chapter uses Grounded Theory and Scharmer’s U-Theory (2005) to explore the insights revealed by action research. This chapter returns our focus in the world of business and community wellbeing; that of farming and food production in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. Karen explores her own reflexive question of how she creates theory from the research environment. Her praxis focus is how to communicate learning within multiple worldviews and from a multi-disciplinary ground. Her use of “sensitising concepts” arising from her use of Grounded Theory enables her to capture emerging concepts so they could be drawn from field activities into theory. This chapter shows us how using established practice theories can develop praxis to inquire, in the intuitive and technical tasks of theory building.

Biographical details

Karen F. Caister

Title: PhD

Organisational affiliation: Lecturer, Agricultural Extension and Rural Resource Management Programme,

School of Agricultural, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of KwaZulu, Natal

Country of residence: South Africa

Email: [caister@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:caister@ukzn.ac.za)

Mark C. Dent

Title: PhD

Organisational affiliation: Senior Lecturer, Environmental Sciences, School of Agricultural, Earth & Environmental Sciences, UKZ

Country of residence: South Africa  
Email: [dent@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:dent@ukzn.ac.za)

Jannette Maryann Green  
Title: Professor  
Organisational affiliation: University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Country of residence: South Africa  
Email: [green@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:green@ukzn.ac.za)

14 *Jo Tacchi, June Lennie, Michael Wilmore - Critical reflections on the use of participatory methodologies to build evaluation capacities in international development organisations*

In this chapter the authors present a critique of participatory methodologies used to build capacities in development projects, in this case, in Nepal. The article works between established claims that participatory research and evaluation builds capacity at programmatic and organisational levels and the specific experiences of these claims in the authors' current work. They highlight the need to address key difficulties such as high turnover of staff and resulting loss of capacity to engage in participatory research and evaluation and the complex power-knowledge relations and contradictions in participatory processes between academics and local practitioners. A key issue is the challenge of addressing the inevitable issues of power inequities that such approaches encounter. While participatory forms of evaluation have been around for some time, it has only enjoyed more widespread recognition of its value in comparatively recent times, with its uptake in international development environments. To this extent, the practice is still in its early stages of development, and Jo, June and Michael's work contributes to strengthening and more comprehensively understanding it. With regard to the meta-theme of this publication, this chapter is an example of how context not only influences the methodology to be used and the praxis of how it is to be used, but contributes to early critical analysis of the key challenges, tensions and issues in implementing an emerging participatory evaluation capacity building methodology.

Biographical details

Jo Tacchi

Title: Professor and Deputy Dean Research and Innovation  
Organisational affiliation: School of Media and Communication, RMIT University  
Country of residence: Australia  
Email: [jo.tacchi@rmit.edu.au](mailto:jo.tacchi@rmit.edu.au)

June Lennie

Title: Senior Research Associate  
Organisational affiliation: School of Media and Communication, RMIT University  
Country of residence: Australia  
Email: [j.lennie@bigpond.net.au](mailto:j.lennie@bigpond.net.au)

Michael Wilmore

Title: Senior Lecturer and Head, Discipline of Media  
Organisational affiliation: Discipline of Media, The University of Adelaide  
Country of residence: Australia  
Email: [michael.wilmore@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:michael.wilmore@adelaide.edu.au)

15 *Maryann Green - Lessons learned from a participatory community capacity building initiative*

Using Kolb's learning cycles, Maryann tells the story of capacitating a local Zulu community, Maphephetheni, to build its economy by developing local tourism. It is a grounded, detailed account, which concludes with significant questions and insights about the impact of introduced inquiry methodologies and strategies to alleviate poverty. Maryann is of the view that the project was not methodologically driven; that the local people's participation with

researcher-led support was the primary means by which development took place. Her team uses Kolb's (1984) learning cycles in their training program, but the community led the development that took place before and after this learning program. Her narrative bravely throws light on the delicate business of formalising local everyday culture to enable development to happen, and the costs of so doing. Pointing towards the publications' concluding discussions on ethics, this chapter raises new moral questions about participatory methodology.

#### Biographical details

Jannette Maryann Green

Title: Professor

Organisational affiliation: University of KwaZulu-Natal

Country of residence: South Africa

Email: [green@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:green@ukzn.ac.za)

#### 16 *Digna Lipa-od Adonis - Indigenous research methodology as a participatory research practice*

Digna works with Igorot cultural practices of knowing as an insider researcher with the Igorot Indigenous peoples of Benguet in the Philippines. Her focus is on learning about knowledge development using Indigenous methods, preserved in cultural protocols and practices as determined by the Elders. While she began with a standard questionnaire approach, Digna rapidly realised that this was not going to create the vitality and meaning that she had envisaged her research would have with her people. She quickly abandoned the survey and as a novice Insider of her own culture, learned about Igorot ways of knowing. To assist with this learning, Digna works between the guidance of her cultural Elders and international perspectives on Indigenous methodologies in the process. Digna's work allows context to produce the research method by recognising the significance of long established knowledge-creation practices as held in intact ethno-specific cultures.

#### Biographical details

Digna Lipa-od Adonis

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: Shontoug Foundation Inc.

Country of residence: Philippines

Email: [digna.adonis@gmail.com](mailto:digna.adonis@gmail.com)

#### 17 *Roland Sundström and Irmeli Mustalahti - Participatory land use planning for REDD: Exploring approaches to avoid leakage and ensure permanence in the context of Angai Village Land Forest reserve*

Addressing the issues of deforestation in Tanzania using the international REDD system (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) Roland and Irmeli use participatory action research to assess the role of participatory forestry management to address climate change issues. Rather than using a pre-existing approach to participation, the authors describe how they discovered that the key issue was to find a way for people to meet their immediate needs without threatening ecosystem services or reduce forest capacity to provide products for subsistence level existence. Irmeli and Roland discuss the tensions between on the one hand, the overarching strategic framework for reducing emissions through "REDD" (which is concerned with universalising technical knowledge about land clearance and climate change), and on the other hand, the very localised knowledge and ways of knowing that participatory forestry requires. Supported by educative facilitators who also listened intently to local preferences, the researchers worked with local villagers to produce Land Use Maps. Using appropriate transdisciplinary tools such as the mapping practice, enabled people to participate in the dynamic relationship between local context and research methodology in a meaningful way.

### Biographical details

Roland Sundström

Organisational affiliation: University of Helsinki

Country of residence: United States of America

Email: [roland.sundstroms@gmail.com](mailto:roland.sundstroms@gmail.com)

Irmeli Mustalahti

Title: Academy Research Fellow, Adjunct Professor (Docent, Forestry)

Organisational affiliation: Institute for Natural Resources, Environment and Society (LYY),  
University of Eastern Finland

Country of residence: Finland

Email: [irmeli.mustalahti@uef.fi](mailto:irmeli.mustalahti@uef.fi)

## 18 *Marion Milton and Les Vozzo - Using new technologies to support the learning of Aboriginal pre-service teachers*

Marion and Les explore the pedagogical requirements for successful engagement of tertiary Aboriginal students in computer-enabled learning environments. The project is one of a number of action research initiatives carried out in partnership between the University of Western Sydney and Charles Darwin University. Their chapter presents useful information about supporting Aboriginal learners in computer-assisted learning environments in the form of a brief literature review. Using this information the authors describe a “Plan, Act, Reflect, Revise” cycle of action research with two cohorts of students. The preliminary rounds of research enabled the course providers to ensure that the students’ needs could be met, as identified by the students through their own action research. Combining literature review with student action research cycles, Les and Marion show the blending of research traditions to not only deliver high quality programs, but programs that reach beyond the class room to have effect in the everyday lives of program participants (in this case, the students’ schools when they commence teaching in Aboriginal communities). This chapter is the end point of our journey, where context determines, integrates and regenerates praxis.

### Biographical details

Marion Milton

Title: Associate Professor

Organisational affiliation: La Trobe University

Country of residence: Australia

Email [m.milton@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:m.milton@latrobe.edu.au)

Les Vozzo

Title: Dr

Organisational affiliation: University of Western Sydney

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [l.vozzo@uws.edu.au](mailto:l.vozzo@uws.edu.au)

## 19 *Mary Brydon-Miller, David Coghlan, Rosalie Holian, Patricia Maguire and Randy Stoecker - Covenantal ethics for action research: Creating a new strategy for ethical review*

Our publication now moves onto the conversation about ethics and the kinds of ethics we need, to govern our methodological decisions, including trans-disciplinary ones. The authors of this chapter raise to our attention the need for “covenantal” approaches to ethics in research to consider the specific natures and outcomes of action research, including research with Indigenous communities. The primary area of concern and potential development is that action research generates change in the context being inquired into and change brings with it many issues such as changes to relationships, that conventional research ethics never consider. This chapter develops our meta-theme in two significant ways; one with regard to protecting and enhancing good practice action research through

appropriate ethical frameworks and the other, with regard to developing the question of ethics in our field, as an ongoing transdisciplinary deliberation in its own right. Whether we are applying a pre-determined methodology within a social context, or enabling that context's actors to determine the methodology to be used, practitioners need very particular ethical frameworks and resulting practices in the spaces between determination, methodology and participation. The authors propose the use of covenantal ethics as an appropriate response to this particular need. We have reserved this series of reflections, contributed to the World Congress by Mary and her colleagues, for the conclusion of our publication, in acknowledgement of the necessity and power of the questions that they raise to each of the chapters that preceded them.

#### Biographical details

Mary Brydon-Miller

Title: PhD; Director, Action Research Center; Professor, Educational and Community-Based Action Research, Educational Studies

Organisational affiliation: University of Cincinnati

Country of residence: USA

Email: [Mary.Brydon-Miller@uc.edu](mailto:Mary.Brydon-Miller@uc.edu)

David Coghlan

Title: Professor of Organisation Development

Organisational affiliation: School of Business, Trinity College Dublin

Country of residence: Ireland

Email: [dcoghlan@tcd.ie](mailto:dcoghlan@tcd.ie)

Rosalie Holian

Organisational affiliation: School of Management, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [rosalie.holian@rmit.edu.au](mailto:rosalie.holian@rmit.edu.au)

Patricia Maguire

Title: Professor Emeritus

Organisational affiliation: Western New Mexico University

Country of residence: USA

Email: [maguire-p@hotmail.com](mailto:maguire-p@hotmail.com)

Randy Stoecker

Title: Professor of Community and Environmental Sociology

Organisational affiliation: University of Wisconsin-Madison

Country of residence: USA

Email: [rstoecker@wisc.edu](mailto:rstoecker@wisc.edu)

## 20 *Rosalie Holian - Reducing the perceived ethical uncertainty of insider action research*

Rosalie focuses her attention on Insider action research, or research carried out within an organisation, community or academic setting for example, by people who are within that setting and about issues meaningful to others also existing within that setting. It is an area of inquiry that has been recognised in the literature for its values of familiarity and trustworthiness that insiders bring to an internal inquiry, while also seen for its risks of difficult pressures on relationships when unpopular findings are made, in particular. Rosalie finds that “covenantal” ethics (which are stated, shared values between researchers and those participating as co-researchers in Insider research settings) can overcome the limitations of conventional ethics. In this chapter, Rosalie addresses the ground between conventional and participatory approaches to inquiry with a mix of conventional and more flexible approaches to ethics. In principle, as long as a conventional starting place with the ethics of relationships does not act against the participatory potential of such starting places, such an approach could also ethically mediate the dialogue between context and methodology.

### Biographical details

Rosalie Holian

Organisational affiliation: School of Management, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Country of residence: Australia

Email: [rosalie.holian@rmit.edu.au](mailto:rosalie.holian@rmit.edu.au)

## 21 *David Coghlan - Grounding value ethics in first person inquiry*

David's reflection brings to our attention the means by which we recognise values and use them in decision-making. This chapter brings to the discussion on ethics in action research an understanding of how participants come into the interplay of context and methodology, making conscious the experience of coming to know. This movement of mind in unfolding relationships and living systems actively contributes to the nature of the living system that is coming into being within the ethical frameworks that govern inquiry. This discussion on ethics is very pertinent to our threading theme of transdisciplinary, systemic and participatory inquiry in spaces and edges.

### Biographical details

David Coghlan

Title: Professor of Organisation Development

Organisational affiliation: School of Business, Trinity College Dublin

Country of residence: Ireland

Email: [dcoghlan@tcd.ie](mailto:dcoghlan@tcd.ie)

## 22 *Patricia Maguire - Considering challenges with enacting conventional ethics in teacher action research*

Patricia raises the ethical question of what kinds of ethics can be applied to govern the relationship between teachers and their inquiry focus, when that focus involves the children that they teach. This involvement may be because the children are the subjects of the research or that their work provides the means by which a teacher inquires into their own practices. Patricia refers to United Nations Human and Children's rights as well as covenantal ethics to provoke further considerations of action research in this context. Referring to internationally recognised human rights to guide ethical considerations, frameworks and approaches to research is another way in which the uncertainties of the interplay between context and methodology can be governed in order to co-determine ethics and methodology in emergent spaces and edges of inquiry. Such references can inform both contractual and covenantal approaches to ethics, thus integrating and underpinning the relationships between these two ethical options.

### Biographical details

Patricia Maguire

Title: Professor Emeritus

Organisational affiliation: Western New Mexico University

Country of residence: USA

Email: [maguire-p@hotmail.com](mailto:maguire-p@hotmail.com)

## 23 *Mary Brydon-Miller and Randy Stoecker - Community covenantal ethics: Case studies in community-based research*

Mary and Randy conclude our publication with three case studies, each of which provides challenging scenarios for ethical determinations. Playfully, they give us no further advice so that the readers can come to and explore their decisions. Mary and Randy's scenarios are an energetic and useful way for our publication to conclude, not with a statement but with a lot of very difficult questions, all of which are grounded in the real-world dilemmas of action research and action learning and the interplays of pre-determined methodologies and those that emerge or influence methodologies from the contexts of inquiry. The suggestion in our concluding focus on

ethics, is that ethical considerations are primary to addressing the dilemmas and resulting power discourses of either predetermined or emergent methodological decisions and that developing forms of ethics appropriate to participatory methodologies is a trans-disciplinary inquiry in its own right.

#### Biographical details

Mary Brydon-Miller

Title: PhD; Director, Action Research Center; Professor, Educational and Community-Based Action Research, Educational Studies

Organisational affiliation: University of Cincinnati

Country of residence: USA

Email: [Mary.Brydon-Miller@uc.edu](mailto:Mary.Brydon-Miller@uc.edu)

Randy Stoecker

Title: Professor of Community and Environmental Sociology

Organisational affiliation: University of Wisconsin-Madison

Country of residence: USA

Email: [rstoecker@wisc.edu](mailto:rstoecker@wisc.edu)

Here I conclude the overview of the chapters, introducing the authors and the relationship between the chapters and our theme. On behalf of the Action Learning Action Research Association, I recommend the selected papers of the 8<sup>th</sup> ALARA World Congress to you as a unique “field” text, drawn from, reflecting and giving back the riches of learning from experience to the global field of action research and action learning. Our hope is that you will include these works in your own deliberations, as you contribute to humanity’s practical steps into integrated, systemic situation-improvements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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