

Editorial

It gives me pleasure to introduce this issue as a new Editor-in-Chief, who was chosen by the Board in 2018.

Welcome to the only issue of the *Action Learning and Action Research Journal* for 2019. As in previous issues, over half of the articles submitted to the journal did not meet the exacting standards of the review panel. Because of this, only one issue could be produced. However, I want to indicate that the articles in this issue are very interesting. They emanate from the 10th Action Learning, Action Research World Congress of 2018. In that sense, they refresh the Congress attendees' minds and give a taste to the non-attendees about the interesting discourses that illuminated the Congress with Action Learning and Action Research narratives. To support my statement, I want to reflect on two articles which speak to the theme of the Congress, "Legacy for Transforming Social Change", which connect well with each other.

The first is by Jack Whitehead on *The action learning, action research experiences of professionals*. Engaging in Action Learning and Action Research means unleashing the collective positive energies to transform social change. In this sense, Action Learning and Action Research bring about transformation, innovation or empowerment. For example, Whitehead quotes Revans, whose ideas on Action Learning were valued by Belgium to bring productivity growth in its industry. In the same line of thought, the world has witnessed groups of professionals who came together to conceptualize technological advancement that has brought us to the current stage of development. Action Learning and Action Research have been the bedrock of such endeavours. In research and educational practice, Action Learning and Action Research can offer the same positive energy that can build humanity and world that we aspire for in our democratic era.

Whitehead gave a keynote address during the 10th World Congress. He related the experiences of professional educational practitioners, action researchers and others concerned with transforming social change for the flourishing of humanity. He covers a number of aspects/headings which aroused my interest especially because he touches on the transformational issues. The crux of Whitehead's presentation was on

Action Learning, Action Research, accounting for ourselves and the importance of digital multi-media narratives for explaining educational influences in a living legacy of transforming social change, with living-educational-theories and living posters (p. 15).

In an era in which the world is transitioning into the fourth industrial revolution, it is inspiring to see Whitehead injecting multi-media into his Action Learning and Action Research, something worth taking home by Action Learners and Action Researchers. This brings up to speed this kind of research with the latest developments! He gives, in this article, a plethora of links to the multi-media and research narratives to learn from by others. He even sees value of his methods of Action Learning and Action Research for his PhD students' work. I would want to try this in addition to "My M&D Students" WhatsApp platform that I have created!

These and other methods that he engages above are important resources by which a professional can show a commitment to improve their practice and contribute to the professional knowledge base. The positive energy cited translates into the energy paradigm which turn brings the psychology of motivation in the professional who desires to see transformation in their practice. Whitehead bases his evidence-based practice (grounded in Action Learning and Action Research) experiences of professionals on Biesta's idea of the interrelations among research, policy and practice which professionals grapple with on a continuous basis. These ideas help the professional, in a peer collective sense, to keep in check education as a moral and political

practice that attracts continuous democratic contestation and deliberation.

The above brings into the mixture the importance of epistemology as a theory of knowledge. Knowledge is an unavoidable aspect in educational epistemology for social transformation. Research agendas and conferences, as well as educational practices engage in knowledge in a contestable manner which attracts power relations. In research, these power relations have birthed the objectivist and constructivist or interpretivist fronts. The objectivist front has for centuries fronted the western thought at the expense of the subaltern or indigenous people. Whitehead draws from Polany and de Sousa Santos, who refer to the crippling mutilations of the objectivist thought that has reigned for centuries, which contributes to epistemicide by killing off indigenous knowledges. This message echoes the decolonial project of scholars such as Chilisa, Smith and Emeagwali, who call for the transformation of research work and practice. Chilisa, for example, identifies Participatory Action Research as one of the research methods which can make us see the dawn of transformation. Participatory Action Research is embraced in Action Learning and Action Research. It is a kind of research which is invitational and opposed to the objectivist thought which is self-looking and not others-looking. Whitehead supports the idea through his claim: *For me, what is 'educational' involves learning with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity* (p. 19).

According to Whitehead, our values influence our political persuasions, our willingness to participate in political action, our career choices and so on. This makes us reflect on the meanings of justice, respect for others, freedom, consideration of interests, respect for persons, which are all guarded by democratic values. In the Southern world, these values are perceived as enshrined in the philosophy of Ubuntu - communal approach to life, unity, respect for one another, being conscious of the fact that I leave because you are, etc. I am saying this because, according to Whitehead, the mutual influences in power-knowledge translate into power relations and epistemicide, which we will forever struggle with if

we do not orientate ourselves in the ideals and principles of Action Learning and Action Research, i.e. to allow each other the space to express their ideas so we can combine our positive energies for the betterment of humanity and social transformation. In this sense, Action Learning Action Research reminds Whitehead of Foucault's distinction between specific intellectual (which advances the ideals of objectivism) and universal intellectual (which is aligned to constructivism). In the dismissal of specific intellectualism, Whitehead quotes Inoue on mindfulness, which is an Eastern epistemological concept. Mindfulness means opening up to multiple views and realities of the world which are spiced with the complexities which lie in diverse cultures, backgrounds, values, etc., and which are opposed to one value system. Action Learning in particular, acts as a catalyst to bring into one such transformation. Whitehead argues, therefore, for a need to shift from neoliberalism and reductionism to collaborative, participative and inclusive paradigm which is driven by love, to connect us with each other as human beings and with nature. His conclusive thought catches my imagination:

If we are going to strengthen the living legacy of AL and AR in transformatory social change, I am claiming that we are going to have to learn how to co-operate more effectively within global-contexts and organisations such as the Action Learning Action Research Association (p. 26).

The second article is *The transformative possibility of literary métissage: An action research report* by Giguère, MacLeod and McBride. Their article reports an ongoing action research advancing an inquiry method with a potential to reveal evidence of individual and collective relational learning resulting from teacher professional development. This article connects well with Whitehead's in the sense that it focuses on professional practitioners and confronts the same issues of epistemicide and killing off subalterns' voices. The authors engage the method of literary métissage. According to them, métissage is a Canadian cultural concept which is a derivative of *Métis sash*, a multicoloured, finger-woven belt attributed to a mixed ancestry culture (p. 32). The authors apply the meaning of the concept in Action Learning and

Action Research from an arts-based inquiry praxis. It represents the weaving of voices. This speaks of the accommodation of different voices which are informed by diverse contexts, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, values, etc. in a collective venture.

In the article, the authors report on the Action Learning and Action Research of the Narrative Inquiry Group, a writing collective from Québec in Canada. The group represents various education sectors, cultural contexts and worldviews. The group draws from each member's positive energies to confront the challenges brought by political, social and technological shifts: *Each of us strives to respect the history, identity and values of other, while navigating a way forward using light-writing, life-writing and literary métissage* (p. 32). Photo voice is used a powerful tool to unleash the narratives from a very critical, reflective, reflexive and systematic view. As stated above, the group's inquiries are premised on action research, conversations, arts-based inquiry, living theory research and adult learning theory.

The authors claim that as a people, *we are Métis civilization ... living within a culture of indigenous ways and immigrant influence* (p. 34). Hence, there is a need to include the idea of expandable and inclusive circles of people by respecting diverse views and interrogating our work through the minds of others. In this workshop which they conducted during the 10th World Congress, the group did not want to impose their ideas, but to solicit contributions from the participative audience so they could enrich theirs. They claim that within the Narrative Inquiry Group, our learning is caring, respectful and relational. Therefore, in our research and educational practice ventures, we should allow each other to claim their space and in an unintimidated manner, enjoy the narrative discourse and feel belonging to the group. *As we learn, we change our ways of thinking, being and knowing in the world* (p. 38). We assess our assumptions. That is the goal of Action Learning and Action Research.

In view of Whitehead's pronouncements above, the relationship of knowledge and power in our contexts are opportunities for inquiry. Teachers, for example, are creators of knowledge. In

creating knowledge, they confront the top-down approaches to professional development. Their knowledge drives action. As action research practitioners, they present themselves with opportunities of knowing and re-knowing the world and understanding others especially their engagement with learners. Action Learning and Action Research, then, causes transformation from depersonalised, undemocratic structures to a vibrant, collaborative, living endeavour informed by individual and collective values and professional development in support of the betterment of schools.

In the end,

our self-directed professional development counterbalances top-down directives. Action and reflection link the teaching experience to sense-making and learning, and with *métissage*, we have experienced the emergence of a collective consciousness, a means to our unanimous desired end - teacher learning for improved practice. (p. 39)

Prof Mishack Gumbo