

Final draft of Chapter:

Whitehead, Jack (2019) *The underlying importance of context and voice in action research*. In: Mertler, Craig A., (ed.) *The Wiley handbook of action research in education*. Wiley handbooks in education . Wiley Blackwell, Oxford, UK, pp. 207-228.

## ***Chapter 10: The Underlying Importance of Context and Voice in Action Research***

### Introduction

Evidence of the global growth in the influence of Action Research can be seen in the conferences and publications of amongst others, the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN)<sup>1</sup>, Action Research Action Learning Association (ALARA)<sup>2</sup>, Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA)<sup>3</sup>, and Network Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI)<sup>4</sup> as well as in Action Research Journals and International Handbooks of Action Research. Whilst there are many thousands of texts on Action Research here are my understandings of Action Research on which this chapter is based.

The first influences in my understandings of critical theory in Action Research were those of Carr and Kemmis in the late 1970s and early 1980s:

Action Research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 162).

I attended the first World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management in Brisbane, Australia in 1990 and agreed with the following points made by Herbert Altrichter, Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (1990).

### **If yours is a situation in which**

- People reflect and improve (or develop) their own work and their own situations
- by tightly interlinking their reflection and action

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.carn.org.uk/?from=carnnew/index.php>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.alarassociation.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://arnawebsite.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eari.ie/>

- and also making their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situation, i.e. their (public) theories and practices of the work at the situation

**and if yours is a situation in which there is increasingly**

- Data-gathering by participants themselves (or with the help of others) in relation to their own question.
- Participation (in problem-posing and in answering questions) in decision making
- Power-sharing and the relative suspension of hierarchical ways of working towards industrial democracy
- Collaboration among members of the group as a “critical community”
- Self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-management by autonomous and responsible persons and groups
- Learning progressively (and publicly) by doing and by making mistakes in a “self-reflective spiral” of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning, etc.
- Reflection which supports the idea of the “(self-) reflective practitioner”
- *open* enough so that further elaboration and development seemed possible
- *allowing for an ex post facto* incorporation of projects into the discussion (which had not been initiative and conducted on the basis of some elaborate understanding of Action Research)
- *and, above all, shared with respect to the process of its formulation for a specific context*

then yours is a situation in which ACTION RESEARCH is occurring.  
(Herbert Altrichter et al. 1990, pp. 19-20)

At this first World Congress I was also introduced to Participatory Action Research (PAR) as developed by Fals Borda and Anisur Rahman (1991). PAR emphasizes collective inquiry and experimentation grounded in experience and social history. Within a PAR process, communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers.

Fals Borda and others organized the first explicitly PAR conference in Cartagena, Colombia in 1977. I attended the 2017 Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) Conference in Cartagena with a celebration of 40 years of PAR and the major contribution of Fals Borda.

Living Theory Action Research is an approach to Action Research in which individual researchers generate their living-educational-theories as explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings (Whitehead 1989).

My first explicitly Action Research enquiry took place in 1977 (Whitehead, 1977) and the following analysis of the underlying importance of context and voice in Action Research is based on my educational influences in my own learning as I continue to explore the implications of asking, researching and answering the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I asked this question in the first lesson I taught at Langdon Park Comprehensive School in London in 1967. Hence this chapter is based on some 50 years professional engagement in education and educational research.

### **1) The importance of context**

In recognising and understanding sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in different contexts of Action Research I am drawing on the ideas of de Sousa Santos (2014) and the questions asked by Hall (2015, 2017).

I shall address contextual influences of colonization and their transcendence through Action Research and Living Theory research in terms of de Sousa Santos' ideas of 'abyssal line', 'subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism', 'epistemicide', 'ecology of knowledges' 'intercultural translation' and 'sociology of absences'.

Santos identifies what he sees as the most fundamental problem of the first decades of the twenty-first century. This is the failure to acknowledge the permanence of what he calls an abyssal line. This is a line dividing metropolitan from colonial societies decades after the end of historical colonialism. He believes that the abyssal line divides social reality so that whatever lies on the other side of the line remains invisible or irrelevant. He says that all the generalizations of the Western social sciences, are flawed to the extent that they take into account only the social reality of metropolitan societies, that is, the social reality on this side of the line. The European universalism, celebrated by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory is based on this truncated view that leaves out the social reality of the other side of the line. Santos says that the most important problem created by the abyssal line is the collapse of social emancipation into social regulation on this side (the metropolitan) of the line.

In Santos' view our fundamental problem is how to reinvent emancipation in the face of regulation in such a way that a degenerative conflation of emancipation into regulation is avoided. In the examples below I shall show how some of those who use Action Research are contributing to the global

enhancement of emancipation in the face of pressures of regulation. It is worth focusing on Santos' point that **we are facing a modern problem that cannot be solved in modern terms**. Santos states that science, including the social sciences, are part of the project of Western modernity. Santos believes that the sciences are much more part of the problem than part of the solution. He says that at the most, they may help us to elucidate and bring analytical precision to the different dimensions of our problem.

Santos advocates what he calls a paradigmatic transition that includes new relationships between epistemology and politics and between epistemology and subjectivity. These new relationships involve a radical break with modern Western ways of thinking and acting. In Part Two below on voice in Action Research I shall explain how the living-theories of Action Researchers are providing such a radical epistemological break with Western ways of thinking and acting. Santos advocates learning from an epistemology in a struggle for what he calls *subaltern insurgent cosmopolitanism* based on a subaltern cosmopolitan reason.

Santos uses the term *cosmopolitanism* to describe the global resistance against abyssal thinking. He recognises that this may seem inadequate in the face of its modernist or Western ascendancy. Santos' phrase, "subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism," refers to:

... the aspiration of oppressed groups to organize their resistance and consolidate political coalitions on the same scale as the one used by the oppressors to victimize them, that is, the global scale.

Santos names insurgent cosmopolitanism as a form of counterhegemonic globalization. At the heart of the efficacy of subaltern, insurgent cosmopolitanism for creating emancipatory actions from the other side of the abyssal line, is the energy of epistemicide. By epistemicide Santos means an energy that comes from a destabilizing image of the murder of knowledge.

He points out that unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinate culture. He goes so far as to claim that in European expansion, the epistemicides perpetrated by hegemonic Eurocentric modernity are one of the conditions of genocide (p.92). Santos embraces an understanding of an ecology of knowledges.

For Santos the ecology of knowledges confronts the logic of the monoculture of scientific knowledge and rigor by identifying other knowledges and criteria of rigor and validity that operate credibly in social practices pronounced non-existent by reason on the other side of the abyssal line. In Part Two of this chapter, on voice in Action Research, I introduce the idea of a living-educational-theory as an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning

of social formations that influence practice and understandings (Whitehead, 1989). I point to the evidence that shows how the living-educational-theories of Action Researchers have identified and gained academic accreditation by identifying other knowledges and criteria of rigour and validity.

...at every step of the ecology of knowledges, it is crucial to ask if what one is learning is valid and if what one already knows should be forgotten or unlearned and why. Ignorance is disqualifying when what one is learning is more valuable than what one is forgetting. (p.188)

Santos emphasises that credibility in the ecology of knowledges does not entail discrediting scientific knowledge. This is consistent with Living Theory Action Research in that a living-educational-theorist includes insights from the most advanced social theories of the day.

In the ecology of knowledges, finding credibility for non-scientific knowledges does not entail discrediting scientific knowledge. It implied, rather using it in a broader context of dialogue with other knowledges. In present conditions, such use of scientific knowledge is counterhegemonic. The point is, on the one hand, to explore alternative conceptions that are internal to scientific knowledge and have become visible through the pluralist epistemologies of various scientific practices (feminist epistemologies in particular) and, on the other, to advance interdependence among the scientific knowledges produced by Western modernity and other, non-scientific knowledges. (189)

As an alternative to both the abstract universalism that grounds Western-centric general theories and to the idea of incommensurability between cultures Santos proposes the idea of intercultural translation. For Santos intercultural translation consists of searching for isomorphic (similar form or structure) concerns and underlying assumptions among cultures. It includes identifying differences and similarities, and developing, whenever appropriate, new hybrid forms of cultural understanding and intercommunication. These new hybrid forms:

...may be useful in favouring interactions and strengthening alliances among social movements fighting, in different cultural contexts, against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy and for social justice, human dignity, or human decency.

The voices of Action Researchers are shown in their living-theories below to be contributing to such a social movement in working and researching to extend the influence of values and understandings that are isomorphic between cultures and carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

The work of intercultural translation can be related to what Lyotard refers to as the postmodern condition:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. (Lyotard, p. 81, 1986)

Santos' claim that it is a living process that is carried out both with arguments and with the emotions deriving from sharing and differing under an axiology of care (pp. 212-213). This living process is isomorphic with the claims of Living Theory researchers concerning the values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. Hence, for Santos, the work of translation is far from being an intellectual exercise. It is a pragmatic instrument for mediation and negotiation. Its purpose is to overcome the fragmentation inherent in the extreme diversity of social experience of the world uncovered by the different ecologies of knowledges. (p.224) Intercultural translations must be converted into blueprints of alliances for collective transformative practices in responding to experiences of epistemicide and postabyssal thinking. I shall show below how this is being done in the living-theories of Action Researchers through co-operative enquiries that are being guided by the values of the international co-operative alliance (<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/coop/coopvalues.pdf>).

Budd Hall (2015) the joint UNESCO Chair with Rajesh Tandon, in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, has offered ideas on moving beyond epistemicide with knowledge democracy and higher education. He addressed some questions to himself:

1. How do I 'decolonize', 'deracialise,' demasculanise and degender my inherited 'intellectual spaces?'
2. How do I support the opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic, and that have exercised dominance over (perhaps have even suffocated) intellectual and scholarly thought and writing?
3. How do I contribute to the building of new academic cultures and, more widely, new inclusive institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate difference and diversity – whether class,

gender, national, linguistic, religious, sexual orientation, epistemological or methodological in nature?

4. How do I become a part of creating the new architecture of knowledge that allows co- construction of knowledge between intellectuals in academia and intellectuals located in community settings? (Hall, 2015, p.12)

These 'I' questions are the kind of questions asked, researched and answered by Action Researchers in generating their own living-educational-theories. On the 16th June 2017 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy: Towards and ecology of knowledges, in Cartagena, Columbia, Budd Hall (2017) highlighted the importance of including indigenous knowledges in an ecology of knowledges. The importance of visual data in indigenous knowledge can be seen in this 9:37 minute video of Budd Hall at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2q5IoK87\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2q5IoK87_k)

in which he says:

'The great turning' a prophecy amongst other things said that the world will realise that it has advanced as far as it can based only on European knowledge and that there will be time and this time has begun when the ancient knowledges of the indigenous world will be needed again to ensure the salvation of the planet and all its living species.

## **2) The importance of voice**

The necessity for the practitioner of speaking on his or her own behalf has been highlighted by Foucault:

You were the first to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this 'theoretical' conversion - to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (Foucault 1980)

Having emphasized the importance of context in Action Research I now want to focus on the importance of voice from a number of very different contexts beginning with voices from China's Experimental Centre for Educational Action Research in Foreign Languages Teaching at Ningxia Teachers University (see <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/moira.shtml> )

### **i) Voices from China**

Li Peidong and Moira Laidlaw (2006) of Ningxia Teachers University, China, have asked, researching and answered their question, How can we facilitate a process of educational change? They focused on collaborative enquiry, Action Research, and curriculum development in rural China:

This article shows how two colleagues, one Chinese, one British, are learning to work together in a Teachers' College in north-west China as we help to facilitate change in our organization. The change constitutes the setting up of Action Research enquiries as a way of enhancing learning and professional development together with changes in The New Curriculum for the teaching of English. Tentative conclusions are drawn about our educational influence on each other, colleagues in our department and beyond, as well as its effects on curriculum development. By working through our assumptions we show some of the benefits of our collaboration and how we have overcome some fundamentally different precepts about education. The most profound of these are concerned with the differing epistemological norms and attitudes to collectivism and individualism. We discover the significance of keeping open minds in enhancing our insights and actions and in our conclusion look to the possible characteristics of our collaboration in the future. (Abstract)

## **ii) Voices from 6 and 10 year old students and their teachers**

The following voices are from 6 and 10 year old students and their teachers in classrooms in the UK with Mounter and in Croatia with Bognar and Zovko (2008) . The students and teachers are engaged in Action Research.

As part of her master's degree, Mounter (2006) researched her educational influence with her 6 year old students as she introduced an Action Research approach to learning using the action-reflection cycle Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) (Wallace, 2008). Mounter's research question was, 'Can children carry out Action Research about learning, creating their own learning theory?'

(<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/tuesdayma/joymounterull.pdf>)

The paper gives access to video-clips of the pupils responding to the questions 'What use is the TASC Wheel?' and 'What do you think of the TASC Wheel?' at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrIDdY>

and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSqg1phEEaM>

The video evidence demonstrates the 6 year olds grasp not only the action reflection process but demonstrates their creativity as they point out a limitation of a two dimensional representation of the TASC process. They emphasise that their Action Research has dynamic qualities that should be included in three dimensional representations of the TASC process.

Branko Bogнар and Marica Zovko (2008) show that 10 year students can become Action Researchers in improving their own learning:

In our inquiry the pupils determined their own challenges with the aim of improving something important in their own lives. We show that Action Research is meaningful only if students engage with it on their own terms, on the basis of their own needs, interests and self-chosen values. Anything that hinders pupils' freedom will only compromise the foundations of Action Research itself and any educational value accrued from it. <http://ejolts.net/node/82>

Branko Bogнар conducted group interviews with pupils trying to check if they truly understood the process of Action Research:

Branko: Would it be possible if you needed to explain to, let's say teacher Vesna's students, what Action Research is, how would you, in the most simple way, explain this to them? So, would you like to tell us?

Tomislav: Well it is research in which you want to, I don't know, research or improve something, something in your life, it doesn't have to be in your life, you just want to find out something about it.

Branko: Good. Go ahead. How would you explain it?

Anica: It is improving something important in your life.

Branko: Good. And how, if they were to ask, how are you going about this research now?

Anica: I make a plan and decide that according to the plan I will try to improve it.

Branko: And how do you know if you have improved something?

Valentina B.: Well somebody can confirm it through an interview. To question somebody whether it has improved. Or record it on tape.

Branko: Good.

Tina: Simply find a critical friend, develop a questionnaire or an interview... I mean, have him watch.

Branko: You just said a critical friend. What do you mean by a critical friend?

Valentina: I already said that he tells you what you haven't done too well, what you can do better, not just praise you: 'Oh that's great, oh that's wonderful'.

Branko: Good. Go ahead. Did you want to say something?

Ana: A critical friend is always with you and he will always give you [ideas], tell you what is missing or what not to do and what to do, he always says...

Tomislav: It's a friend who gives you advice about the things you didn't do right in your plan and the things that you did and what you could improve.

Branko: Good. Thank you. Did somebody else want to say something?

Branko: Well, tell me are you, when somebody tells you... for instance someone tells you that something is not good, that you didn't do something right, gives you some kind of remark, criticism, how do you feel? Are you angry with your critical friend or are you glad that he said that to you?

Ana: No, because if there was something missing, he was supposed to tell me because I chose him to tell me such things.

Branko: Go ahead. Did you want to say something?

Marsel: Well, I am glad that he tells me that because we have to know something about ourselves as well, to gather some information.

Branko: Good. Did you want to say something?

Marijana: Well, I don't get angry if he tells me something's wrong. I don't get angry about that.

Branko: Is there anybody who didn't feel too comfortable?

Valentina: Me. I mean, to me, when they say it, I feel sort of regretful, but I still take it because I know that sometimes I have to face consequences in life.

Branko: Good. And tell me, when you finish with a certain part of your performance, your activities and when you complete your own plan, what do you do after that?

Anica: Start with new plans.

Branko: How do you start with a new plan?

Anica: Well the same way we did with the first one. I'll make a plan and start researching again.

Branko: Will it be related to what you have previously done or will it be something completely different?

Anica: It can be completely different or it can be something similar.

Branko: If it is related to your previous work, how will your previous work help you?

Anica: Well it'll help with the plan. The way I did it, the way my family reacted, that way I'll be able to see how I will develop my plan, how I can act. (Bognar, 2004a) ...

Bognar writes:

Several pupils succeeded in writing reports and I made an agreement with Vesna Šimid to have the validation process in her classroom. Marica took four students in her car to Vesna's school in Klakar where they presented their Action Research inquiries. Vesna's pupils listened to Marica's pupils attentively, asked questions and then rewarded them with spontaneous applause. As shown in Video 4 and Figure 5 it's possible to see that Marica's pupils had prepared written reports in the form of posters on big sheets of paper and with my support they fulfilled the validation aspects of their Action Research. Later Marica repeated this procedure in her classroom and helped pupils to gain control over the whole process of Action Research.

Video 4. [Validation of a pupil's Action Research report](https://vimeo.com/1415387) - see <https://vimeo.com/1415387>

See pages 30-33

[http://ejolts.net/files/journal/1/1/Bognar\\_Zovko1\(1\).pdf](http://ejolts.net/files/journal/1/1/Bognar_Zovko1(1).pdf)

**iii) Voices from The Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN)**

The Collaborative Action Research Network began as the Classroom Action Research Network in 1976 and supported the formation of the Journal, Educational Action Research in 1993. Mark Hadfield and Kaye Haw (2001) emphasize the importance of 'Voice', young people and Action Research:

This article moves from an overview of what is meant by the term 'voice' to discussing the significance of its links with Action Research. It does this through using a simple typology of three types of voice: Authoritative, Critical and Therapeutic. Each type of voice represents a different process of articulation and intended outcome. It then moves on to consider 'voice' and the collaboration of young people in educational Action Research by unpicking a series of four assumptions which delineate major theoretical and practical possibilities and limitations. These assumptions provide a critique of the underpinning ideologies held by professionals when supporting and listening to young people. (p. 485)

#### **iv) Voices from Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA)**

The Action Learning Action Research Association began as the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association in 1990. The 2018 World Congress of ALARA in Vermont, USA, is committed to sharing the following voices in five keynotes organised by Emmanuel Tetteh, the International Vice-President of the Action Learning, Action Research Association.

The keynote speaker for Track One on "Action Learning, Action Research (AL/AR) Experiences of Individuals." Is Hilary Bradbury, a scholar-practitioner whose work focuses on the human and organizational dimensions of creating collaborative learning communities.

Bradbury convenes the global network of Action Researchers which seeks to transform conventional notions of knowledge production. Called AR+ [actionresearchplus.com](http://actionresearchplus.com), their mission is "accomplishing more good together." I do urge you to add your voice to AR+

The keynote speaker for Track Two on the AL/AR Experiences of Professionals, is myself. Dr. Tetteh accurately describes me as:

... a Living Educational Theorist based in the UK. Previously at the University of Bath, he is now a Visiting Professor at the University of Cumbria, UK and Ningxia Teachers University in Ningxia, China. He originated the idea that individuals could create their own explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of

others and in the learning of the social formations in which their inquiries are located, as their living-educational-theories. He pioneered the use of digital, multi-media narratives for clarifying and evolving the meanings of the expression of embodied values in explanations of educational influence, in research degrees. The resources on his website <http://www.actionresearch.net> are an international resource for Action Researchers who are generating their own living-theories with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. These theories are generated from inquiries of the kind, “How do I improve what I am doing? In which ‘I’ exists as a living contradiction.”

The keynote speaker for Track Three on the AL/AR for Communities’ Developments, is Mary Brydon-Miller. Brydon-Miller is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, & Organizational Development in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville. She is a participatory Action Researcher who conducts work in both school and community settings. Her most recent research focuses on research ethics in educational and community settings and on the transformation of institutions of higher education through Action Research. She is the editor, with David Coghlan, of the SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research and is completing work on a book on ethical challenges in the context of participatory research with her colleague Sarah Banks from Durham University. Her next major project focuses on working with middle-school students from around the world to engage as citizen scientists to better understand the impacts of global climate change.

The keynote speaker for Track 4 on the AL/AR for Organizational Advancements, is Ernie Stringer. (For details of the voice of Ernie Stringer see the section below on Voices from Indigenous knowledge enquiries in Australia).

The keynote speaker for Track 5 on “Action Learning, Action Research for Global Initiatives.” is Hassana Alidou.

Alidou is the coauthor of “Action Research to improve youth and adult literacy in multilingual contexts: Empowering learners in a multilingual world.” This book provides guidance for trainers of youth and adult educators and for those who manage non-formal education and curriculum development programmes in youth and adult literacy.

One of the greatest challenges in education today is to adapt and respond to a linguistically and culturally diverse world, and to combat social disintegration and discrimination. Participatory and collaborative Action Research represents an empowering and emancipatory approach to this challenge because the ‘target groups’ become involved as equal partners. (Bookcover, Alidou and Glanz,

2015)

A Collaborative Panel Discussion at the 10<sup>th</sup> World Congress of ALARA with all five Keynote Speakers, will focus on the action learning question: Where do we go from here, in the quest of addressing The Action Learning and Action Research Legacy for Transforming Social Change? Readers of this chapter could contribute to this ongoing conversation from the homepage of ALARA (<https://www.alarassociation.org/>)

**v) Voices from The Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA), including both North and South America**

The Action Research Network of the Americas began in 2012 and held its first ARNA conference in 2013. You can access its democratic, multi-voice, multiple perspectives stance of Action Research at:

<http://www.arnacnect.org/>

The Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) brings together people of the Americas and beyond who engage in and support Action Research. We have created a website that can be read by visitors and edited by members. In keeping with the democratic, multi-voice, multiple perspectives stance of Action Research, we invite our members to join us as web developers to help create the future of ARNA-connect. We hope you will explore and become involved as a member. We are a growing network and welcome active participation!

1. Watch a video about how ARNA got started. Explore the ARNA website to find more information about ARNA. If you attended a conference you are a member.
2. Check out the "Resources" and think about what resources you can to the site.
3. Explore the ARNA Member and the University/Organizations and Network Map. Being an ARNA member is a bit like joining your public radio station-- you don't have to join but it is good for all of us if you do.
4. Use the ARC tab to explore the Action Research Communities (ARCs) of ARNA. Members can join one of these communities. We are just beginning this so you can be one of the leaders here.

**vi) Voices from Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)**

Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) was established in 1982. PRIA's mission is building capacities of citizens, communities and institutions, to enable vibrant, gender-equal societies. See:

<https://www.pria.org>

PRIA's Founder-President, Rajesh Tandon highlights the importance of active citizenship in PRIA:

"Active citizenship is about both rights and obligations. Great policies and big schemes cannot automatically result in improvements in people's lives without collective awareness and actions of citizens for whose public good they are created. Also, merely pin-pointing the weakness of government institutions is not enough; we have to find ways to support them to improve their capacities and functioning."  
– Dr. Rajesh Tandon, PRIA.

The motto of PRIA is **Knowledge. Voice. Democracy.** These involve; valuing diversity of knowledge cultures - forms, languages, expressions; listening, supporting and amplifying the voice of hitherto excluded, their dreams, hopes, frustrations, pains; promoting practices and rituals of participatory democracy and making institutions transparent and accountable to citizens.

In this section I am also highlighting the voice of Dr. Swaroop Rawal (2006) from her work in India, especially in supporting the education of girls. Here is the Abstract from her doctoral thesis on 'The Role Of Drama In Enhancing Life Skills In Children With Specific Learning Difficulties In A Mumbai School: My Reflective Account' <http://www.actionresearch.net/living/rawal.shtml>

This thesis is a reflective account of an Action Research project set in a drama classroom. It is a multi-voiced patchwork text which is created and built imaginatively to re-present my students and my experience in the drama classroom.

On one level it deals with the question 'How can drama be used to enhance life skills in children with specific learning disabilities studying in a school in Mumbai?' On the second level it is related to the question 'How can I improve my practice?'

This research is concerned with a teacher's capacity to recognise and realise the opportunity of an alternate reality in teaching. The reality of loving and caring for the students. The reality of an empathetic, compassionate, just and democratic classroom.

The foundation of this study was laid when I saw the children in need suffer due to insensitive teaching practices and uncooperative peers and family. I was concerned with the trauma faced by students in the prevalent educational setting in India. I believe that what I do in education should help make changes for the better in our society. Life

skills enhancement, in my understanding, was a way to alleviate the stress the children experienced seeing that life skill education promotes mental well-being in young people and behavioural preparedness... Additionally, this study investigates the influences of Action Research on my practice and the impact of engaging in the stages of Action Research which provided me with a methodical structure for implementing and analyzing the teaching and the learning process. This defined structure guided me through systematic and conscious data collection, data analysis, and reflection. The data is composed of classroom observations and transcripts, a collection of the students and my work and interviews with their schoolteachers and parents... (Rawal, 2006, Abstract)

Over ten years later, in her continuing post-doctoral enquiries into enhancing the learning of marginalized children, Rawal (2017) writes in, "Making the 'impossible' possible: using a Living Theory methodology to improve my practice."

This paper explores how I had a change of understanding concerning my relationship with the children of my country, and how I entered an 'I-You' relationship (Buber, 1970) of genuine love and care. The change encouraged me to negate the contradictions I experienced in my practice and take concrete steps towards the betterment of their learning. The gifts and talents of the marginalized children have persistently been dismissed and it has been alleged that they are 'impossible' to teach. As I try to make the 'impossible' possible, I draw attention to the education of the rural children in India who have unequal opportunities and education; with proper motivation they can achieve beyond what some consider to be possible.

Through a multi-media representation of my classroom, I discuss the unexplored domain of pre-vocational education in the primary school. I believe it to be a field for consideration, scrutiny and research if we hope to augment the educational competencies of our children to enable their seamless entry into the world of work.

I share my students' and my own experiences in learning as I seek to communicate an innovative paradigm of vocational education, while using a living educational theory approach to answer the question, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' (Rawal, 2017, p. 72)

**vii) Voices from the Network For Educational Action Research Ireland (NEARI)**

<http://www.eari.ie/neari-network-for-educational-action-research-in-ireland/>

NEARI is a network for Action Researchers who are new to Action Research, as well as those who are working on Action Research projects along with some who are life-long Action Researchers. This is a cross sectoral group with participants from all levels of the education system. If you would like to learn more about what is happening at NEARI, read our blog at <http://www.eari.ie/> or if you would like to join the NEARI network, please contact us at [info@eari.ie](mailto:info@eari.ie)

At NEARI we support and promote educational Action Research opportunities, while providing a platform for sharing and disseminating our research, publications, key contacts, history and current activities to teachers, schools, and communities. The aim of this network is:

- to contribute to the greater good and growth of educational knowledge by sharing our research stories and useful resources
- to provide encouragement and support for Action Researchers in conducting rigorous and evidence based work,
- to provide opportunities for personal and critical engagement through networking and resource sharing,
- to link Action Researchers in Ireland with the broader global Action Research communities
- to build an Action Research platform to enhance learning and teaching in educational contexts and in teacher education in Ireland.

Whilst Roche, McDonoagh, Glenn and Sullivan have produced several books since being awarded their Living Theory doctorates from the University of Limerick in Ireland in 2006 and 2007, their voices and narratives in their doctorates remain a lasting testimony to their original contributions to the knowledge-base of Action Research:

2007\_“Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy: interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just community of enquiry”  
Mary Roche’s PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

2007 “ My living theory of learning to teach for social justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realise our learning potentials?”  
Caitriona McDonagh’s PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

2006 “Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice.”  
Máirín Glenn’s PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

2006 “ A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality”  
Bernie Sullivan’s PhD thesis (University of Limerick)

**viii) Voices from the Bluewater Action Research Network (Canada) (BARN)**

<https://www.teachontario.ca/community/explore/tlppke/completed-projects/projects/bluewater-action-research-network-barn/content?filterID=contentstatus%5Bpublished%5D%7Eobjecttype%7Eshowall>

One of the problems with context and voice in Action Research is that texts, such as this, are heavily influenced by the limitations of the hegemonic influences of Western academic traditions. For example, it was only in 2004 that the Senate of the University of Bath, changed its regulations, governing the submission of research degrees, to permit the submission of e-media. This opened the way for the inclusion and use of digital visual data as evidence in an Action Researcher’s explanation of their educational influence in learning. It isn’t easy, within the printed text-base of an International Handbook, to point to some of the limitations of this form of communication, especially in communicating the meanings of the embodied expressions of energy-flowing values in the practices and explanations of Action Researchers. However, I do hope that you will take the time to access the ‘living-poster’ of the Bluewater Action Research Network (BARN) in Canada, to appreciate their innovative use of multi-media narratives to clarify and communicate their educational inquiries.

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/barn020617.pdf>

**ix) Voices from Indigenous knowledge enquiries in Australia**

Here is Dr. Emmanuel Tetteh’s introduction to the voice of Dr. Ernie Stringer:

Dr. Ernie T. Stringer is intended to serve as the WC Keynote Speaker for the Stream/Track Four on the AL/AR for Organizational Advancements. Dr. Stringer has spent the last 50 years as a teacher, practitioner, professor, and Action Researcher; he has an extensive background in education, including ten years as a primary teacher, and ten years in teacher education at Curtin University. Over that time, Dr. Stringer has engaged with others to think generatively and to develop a new vision for humanity. It is through this effort that he hopes to better equip people to locate new solutions and possibilities for themselves and the communities of which they are a part. Through teaching—from the primary to the Ph.D. level—Ernie’s experiences have covered a broad spectrum, and he attributes this diverse history

to who he is. Dr. Stringer has also made significant contributions by authoring numerous influential texts on Action Research, including Action Research in Education (2008), Action Research in Health (with Genat, 2003), Action Research in Human Services (with Dwyer, 2004), and Integrating Teaching, Learning, and Action Research (with Christensen, & Baldwin, 2009).

At the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University (1986–2003) he engaged in Action Research projects and consultancies in schools, Aboriginal communities, government departments, non-government organizations and business corporations. In 1988, he assisted in the development of an Australian National Aboriginal Education Policy. He was contracted by UNICEF (2002–2005) to direct a highly successful community engagement project for the East Timor Department of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports. Through visiting appointments at universities in Illinois, New Mexico, Texas and New York, he has maintained continuing connection with an international network of scholars in education, anthropology, and sociology. He is the author of numerous action texts and past President of the Action Learning, Action Research Association. For most of the past decade, he was an Associate Editor of the Action Research journal, while engaging in Action Research activities with local Aboriginal people in the Ngaanyatjarra school system in Western Australia.

There are further voices that focus on Indigenous Knowledge from an Australian context in:

Cairns, H. & Harney, I, B. (2014) Four Circles – Customs that are Law in an Aboriginal Cosmoscape: Justice, Mercy and Survival in Bill Harney’s Imulun Wardaman Aboriginal Spiritual Law. (Review by Masters & Whitehead, 2017)

**Review:** ‘There can be a really good ending in Imulun in Australia’, (heading, p.201).

This book does not fall readily into any single genre (or other)-category, which is part of its very real interest. There is something significant and appealing here for anyone, based on Four Circles’s deep humanity and spirituality; however, it is especially for those with an interest in, and concern for the immediate and long-term future of ‘Two-Worlds’ Aboriginal and other Indigenous peoples, within the apparently ‘assimilation-based’ Justice system in Northern Territory.

Without detailed knowledge, e.g. of formal Australian law and related practice, and as outsiders, there is much that we are not qualified to

comment on or discuss. However, we can attempt to illustrate how the voices of Bill Idumduma Harney and Hugh Cairns sit within 'Living-Theory' Action-Research practice, and present and consider, in outline only, the case they make for an appreciative and deep valuing of their Marriage and Family Customary Law; and for its approach to redeeming their miscreants to be more widely adopted.

The context in which we write this review is one of deep distress on all sides, as a Royal Commission is being set up to investigate the various forms of extreme abuse, including tear-gassing of young Aboriginal boys in the 'Don Dale' Juvenile Detention Centre in N.T.. From what we can gather on-line, this is now deeply political. Bill Idumduma Harney, and Four Circles, may have an explicit role in the investigations and recommendations.

Deneulin, S, (2014), introduces a Peruvian lady who 'had to stop her (environmental) activism out of fear (of severe intimidation)', (p.80). She goes on to say, 'This lack of capacity to express one's emotions and suffering severely affects the capability for voice and political participation'. There is 'capable', carefully-considered truth-telling about suffering in Four Circles from both authors, which seems to us to be highly relevant in our context, with a valuable constructive approach. The Royal Commission could provide a constitutional setting for direct, politically-relevant participation. Four Circles is far from being a political diatribe; rather, a strongly-voiced expression of pain. It seems to us to be a strong and well-considered offering of an essential, practical, value-based way forward which demands attention, rather than an 'attacking' text. It is based on trust that the book will help the 'White Man' to 'wise-up', and do the right thing in the best interests of all. In recommending the book, we are aligning ourselves with this tone.

The book's Dedication, to be found at the end, (p.210), is therefore significant:

It is dedicated to the indigenous people of the Australian continent: with praise for their courage in keeping to the road of freedom, equality and community; and with prayers for the fulfillment of their hopes and expectations in Australia where their land is loved, their families are nurtured, and their spiritual Life and Law given freedom under a spiritual Sovereign, under a Parliament and Government elected to govern for all the people, in honour and respect for the lives and cultures and persons of everyone: Originals, Settlers and New. (p. 210)

**x) Voices from the Action Research Africa Network (ARAN)**

## **Action Research Africa Network**

This network enables Action Researchers in the UK to learn from African researchers about Ubuntu as a way of being as they explore multi-media narratives for representing their Action Research studies.

Eden Charles (2007) has made an original contribution to educational knowledge about Ubuntu in his response to his question: How Can I Bring Ubuntu As A Living Standard of Judgement Into The Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification And Guiltless Recognition. Here is the Abstract to his thesis:

This is a living theory thesis which traces my engagement in seeking answers to my question that focuses on how I can improve my practice as someone seeking to make a transformational contribution to the position of people of African origin. In the course of my enquiry I have recognised and embraced Ubuntu, as part of an African cosmology, both as my living practice and as a living standard of judgement for this thesis. It is through my Ubuntu way of being, enquiring and knowing that my original contribution to knowledge has emerged.

Two key approaches are identified and described in depth: 'guiltless recognition' and 'societal re-identification'. These emerge from a perception of self that is distinct within but not isolated in an awareness of 'inclusionality'. They are intimately related concepts. Guiltless recognition allows us to move beyond the guilt and blame that maintains separation and closes down possibility. It provides a basis for action and conception that moves us towards the imagined possibilities of societal reidentification with Ubuntu...

Visual narratives are used to represent and help to communicate the inclusional meanings of these living standards of judgement. The narratives are focused on my work as a management consultant and include my work with Black managers. They explain my educational influence in creating and sustaining the Sankofa Learning Centre for Black young people in London. They include my living as a Black father seeking to remain present and of value to my son within a dominant discourse/context in which this is a contradiction to the prevalent stereotype. (Charles, 2007, Abstract)

You can access Charles (2007) thesis from  
<http://www.actionresearch.net/living/edenphd.shtml>

The importance of context and voice in Action Research has been stressed by Keizer-Remmers (2017) whose doctorate was awarded by the University for Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, for her thesis on 'Underneath the Surface of Cosmopolitanism: In search of cosmopolitanism in higher education.' My reason for including Keizer's point on cosmopolitanism below, is that Keizer engages with cosmopolitanism as a moral concept that, for me, carries hope for the flourishing of humanity, in the context of professional higher education:

Looking for cosmopolitans: An unexpected journey

Writing a doctoral thesis is a puzzling endeavour. It is like embarking on an expedition with a fair idea about the destination, the route to follow, and the duration of the journey. One starts out with a more or less coherent itinerary, clear stops on the route, and a well-defined end in mind – only to find out that it has seemingly autonomously evolved into a completely different expedition; it develops as it goes along and becomes something one has neither anticipated nor planned.

In my case, I set off on a quest to find cosmopolitans, but instead encountered myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 2000, p. 93). As such, this exploration has benefited from a metamorphosis from a post-positivist rationalistic plan to 'prove something' into a participant-led socio-analytic visual study – one that is embedded in an account of a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983, 1987) as she grapples with cosmopolitanism as an inspirational moral concept for professional higher education. (p.17)

### **Voices from the Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS)**

EJOLTS was established in 2008 to provide a public, freely accessible forum, for Action Researchers, self-study researchers and other researchers who were willing to hold themselves to account, in their explanations of educational influences in learning, for living their values and understandings as fully as possible.

**EJOLTS** is committed to publishing living-educational-theory (often shortened to living-theory) accounts of practitioner-researchers from a wide range of global, social, cultural and professional contexts. We welcome submissions from all Living Educational Theory (often shortened to Living Theory) researchers who wish to contribute rigorous and valid accounts of their living-theories to improving educational knowledge.

The journal focuses on the living-theories of practitioner-researchers. Researchers generate their living-theories as their values-based

‘explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations’ (Whitehead, 1989) in the process of researching questions such as, ‘How do I improve what I am doing’. The values at the heart of Living Educational Theory research (often shortened to Living Theory research) are the life-enhancing values that are relational and ontological, in the sense that they give meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals and groups. They are values that carry hope for the future of humanity, such as love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, care and democracy.

<http://ejolts.net>

You can access the archive of contributors from <http://ejolts.net/archive> with the current (December 2017 issue) accessible from:

<http://ejolts.net/current>

I have explained above how important it is to access digital, multi-media texts for communicating the meanings of the embodied expressions of relational and ontological values. These are the values that are used as explanatory principles in the explanations of Action Researchers of their educational influences in learning.

Because of the importance of digital, multi-media texts in transcending some of the limitations in my present, printed text-based writings I do urge you to access the homepage of living-posters at:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage020617.pdf>

Here is the invitation to create and share your living poster and encourage others to do the same by:

- Creating and uploading a 2-3minute video-clip to YouTube of you communicating the essentials of your context, interests, research passions, practice and values as the explanatory principles and living standards of judgment to which you hold yourself accountable in your practice.
- Creating an attractive A4 poster including text and images, and the url to your YouTube video, which provides brief details of your: context; interests; the values that motivate you and give your life meaning and purpose; research passions; details of a few of your key publications; the url to your website if you have one and your contact details.
- Sending us two files of your living poster i) as a PDF and ii) in whatever programme you have used to create it e.g. WORD, Pages, PowerPoint. with 1-4 keywords that summarise the essence of what you are about to [jack@actionresearch.net](mailto:jack@actionresearch.net).

## Conclusion

I began this chapter on context and voice in Action Research by drawing on ideas from de Sousa Santos' (2014) social science theory. These ideas on 'epistemicide' helped me to explain the contribution of Action Researchers to an epistemological transformation in educational knowledge with a grounding in the embodied knowledges of Action Researchers. I shall conclude this chapter by drawing ideas from other social scientists to draw a distinction between the dominating influences of global, neo-liberal economic forces and the counter hegemonic influences of Action Researchers who are supporting co-operative economics.

Jones (2015) has analysed corporate power and questioned the idea of a responsible capitalism whilst advocating actions that move towards social accountability. Jones and O'Donnell (2017) have offered alternatives to neoliberalism in actions that move towards equality and democracy. I am suggesting that the global, transformative influences of Action Researchers, in enhancing the flow of values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity rest, will include analyses such as those offered by Jones and Jones and O'Donnell that reveal the way that neo-liberal economics serve to constrain these values and understandings. The international co-operative alliance offer co-operative economic practices that are transcending these constraints (See - <http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles> )

Action Researchers, who are committed to co-operative values and understandings, seek to live as fully as possible the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Co-operative action-researchers believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

If the above ideas resonate with your own ontological values and research interests do make your own contributions, from your own context and in your own voice, to the community of Living Theory Action Researchers, narrative inquirers, self-study researchers and autoethnographic researchers who are already contributing to enhancing the influence of Living Theory research as a social movement.

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