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# Contents

# Editorial

This issue of the *International Journal of Action Research* presents five articles from different socio-political contexts, as well as research practices related to different fields and experiences. What binds them together is action research as a method for co-producing knowledge together with stakeholders, be it in organisations, schools or sport events..

The first article, by John Andersen and Annette Bilfeldt, describes and analyses two contexts: nursing homes and libraries, where the authors show how action research may contribute to social innovation and empowerment in public welfare and cultural institutions, in a manner that supports the interests of marginalised citizens and local communities, and creates opportunities for positive change. Empowerment, action research and innovation constitute the conceptual reference, rooted in critical social theory. The article ends with two challenges to be considered in action research. The first one is about facilitating innovative forms of organisation, such as multifunctional community centres, and make them visible as relevant structures, rather than seeing them as special exceptions. The second challenge is about managing dilemmas in practical action research, especially related to power abuse in a supposedly democratic process of knowledge production.

Satu Kalliola, Jukka Niemelä and Ossi Eskelinen study the relation between work and university study in a growing competitie social context. Their conclusion is that instead of study-friendly practices at the workplaces, universities are adopting work-friendly practices, including e-learning, to support their students. The participants were students, teachers and advisors as well as employers. Using Democratic Dialogue as methodological procedure, the authors explore the different perspectives on this issue facing the majority of university students today. In spite of the difficulties, the authors are optimistic about the role the university can play in balancing conflicting interests.

The article "Field-configuring events and action research", by Helge Svare and Eugenia Vathakou, attempt to match these two theoretical frameworks. Field-configuring events, as the authors explain, was developed within neo-institutional theory, the aim of which is to understand how institutions and organisations function and change. Analysing SpARTathlo event in the Greek town of Sparta, they demonstrate how the framework enables both a more multifaceted and more comprehensive understanding of the event, and how this has practical implications for the improvement of such events.

Erika Natacha Fernandes de Andrade and Marcus Vinicius da Cunha test the hypothesis that the comprehension of John Dewey's philosophical and educational conceptions can help teachers to construct significant possibilities in teaching artistic languages and forming creative subjects. The research context was the Baião, a Brazilian musical genre, chosen as an expressive way to produce aesthetic, rhetorical and poetic experiences. In the conclusion they point out that the Deweyan proposition about reflexive thinking, that it is developed through artistic and aesthetic experiences, teach us that scientific research can be lively and enriching, not limited by techniques or protocols unrelated to the moral values of the researcher.

The fifth article takes us back to elderly care. Rodney Beaulieu, Hyun Gu Kang and Shoko Hino study a community health programme that was piloted at San Marcos Senior Activity Centre in California over a two-year period, patterned from the Jaques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics method, known to reduce fall rates by half, and improve cognition and mood in older adults. The article presents the older adults' perceptions on the strengths and challenges of the programme, and their recommendations for making improvements in the next action research phase. The authors highlight that more research is needed to understand how physical activities might offset the degenerative process of aging, and improve health after an injury, and what kinds of activities are best for this purpose.

We thank the authors and reviewers for their collaboration, and expect the articles to be of interest for practitioners and researchers.

Danilo Streck
Editor-in-chief

# Transforming welfare institutions through social innovation and action research in Denmark

*John Andersen and Annette Bilfeldt*

**Abstract**
The article will present how action research may contribute to social innovation and empowerment in public welfare and cultural institutions (nursing homes and libraries) in a manner that supports the interests of marginalised citizens and local communities, and creates opportunities for positive change. First, we introduce the concepts of empowerment, action research and social innovation along with the roots of these concepts in critical social theory. Secondly, two case studies are presented to analyse two different methodological variants of action research in two different contexts. The first case is about action research in nursing homes, where the objective was to improve elder care through more autonomy and better quality of life for residents and employees. In this project (inspired by critical utopian action research), so called 'future workshops' were applied to create "free space" for reflection and creation of concrete suggestions of social innovation in elder care. The second case is about the transformation of a public library into a community centre. In this case, the aim was to break down barriers between citizens and public institutions in a deprived, multicultural urban area and thereby promote local community empowerment. In this project, 'empowerment evaluation' was used as an action research method. In the final part we compare the two approaches (utopian action research and empowerment facilitation), and discuss the danger of falling into the trap of localism, where successful social innovations: instead of being *up-scaled* and widely distributed, end up as one-offs or simply die out at the very local level

**Keywords**: action research, social innovation, public libraries, elder care, empowerment evaluation

**Transformando instituciones de bienestar a través de la innovación social y la investigación-acción en Dinamarca**

**Resumen**
El trabajo presentará cómo la investigación-acción puede contribuir para la innovación social y el empoderamiento en instituciones culturales y de bienestar público (hogares de ancianos y bibliotecas), de una forma que apoye los intereses de los ciudadanos marginados y las comunidades locales y crie oportunidades para un cambio positivo. En primer lugar, introducimos los conceptos críticos de 'empoderamiento', 'investigación-acción' e 'innovación social', junto con las raíces de estos conceptos en la teoría social crítica. En segundo lugar, se presentan dos casos de estudio para analizar dos variantes metodológicas diferentes de la investigación-acción en dos contextos diferentes. El primer

caso es sobre la investigación-acción en hogares de ancianos, cuyo objetivo fue mejorar el cuidado de ancianos mediante una mayor autonomía y una mejor calidad de vida para los residentes y empleados. En este proyecto (inspirado por la investigación-acción utópica crítica) se aplicaron los llamados "futuros talleres" para crear un "espacio libre" para la reflexión y creación de sugerencias concretas de innovación social en el cuidado de ancianos. El segundo caso es sobre la transformación de una biblioteca pública en un centro comunitario. En este caso, el objetivo fue romper las barreras entre los ciudadanos y las instituciones públicas, en un área urbana multicultural privada, y así promover el empoderamiento de la comunidad local. En este proyecto se utilizó la "evaluación del empoderamiento" como método de la investigación-acción. En la parte final, comparamos los dos enfoques (investigación-acción utópica y facilitación del empoderamiento), y discutimos el peligro de caer en la trampa del localismo, donde las innovaciones sociales exitosas – en vez de ser en mayor escala y ampliamente difundidas – terminan en una sola aplicación o simplemente mueren en el nivel local.

**Palabras clave**: investigación-acción, innovación social, bibliotecas públicas, cuidado de ancianos, evaluación del empoderamiento.

## Introduction

The first International Handbook on Social Innovation was published in 2013 (Moulaert et al. 2013). In the handbook, 'social innovation' is defined as processes that generate a) the provision of resources and services in response to social needs b) the development of trust and empowerment within marginalised populations and c) the transformation of those power relations that produce social exclusion through the transformation of governance mechanisms (Miquel et al. 2013, p. 155). According to this understanding, social innovation concerns "not just particular actions, but also the mobilisation-participation processes and (…) the *outcome* of actions which lead to improvements in social relations, structures of governance, greater collective empowerment, and so on" (Moulaert et al. 2013, p. 2).

The term 'social exclusion' concerns the mechanisms and conditions that fully or partially exclude individuals or groups from self-determination and influence over their own life situations and living conditions, and that fully or partially exclude them from participation and social rights that the majority of citizens have access to in society. The opposite of exclusion is inclusion, meaning processes through which marginalised or excluded groups may acquire more power over their own life situation, self-determination and access to the same living conditions and rights as the majority of society has access to (Larsen & Andersen 2013). Processes leading from exclusion to inclusion can be seen as 'empowerment processes', leading from relative powerlessness to a situation of increased self-determination and influence. 'Social innovation research', then, is studies of social innovative initiatives that provide a response to social exclusion and social inequality (Moulaert et al. 2013, p. 3). In social innovation research there is a collaboration between researchers and stakeholders on social experiments that can support social change that is progressively inclusive and democratic.

The purpose of this article is to show how action research can contribute to social innovation and empowerment in public welfare and cultural institutions (nursing homes and libraries) in a manner that facilitates marginalised citizens' and local communities' power position and creates opportunities for positive change. The article first introduces the criti-

cal concepts of empowerment, action research and social innovation, and the roots of these traditions in critical social theory. The next part analyses two different methodological variants of action research in two different contexts: The first is about action research in nursing homes (in the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen), where the objective was improving elder care through more autonomy and better quality of daily life for both residents and employees. In the project, future workshops were used to create a "free space" where concrete suggestions of social innovation in elder care was developed. The second example is about the transformation of a public library into a community center in the multicultural and poorest urban district of Gellerup in Denmark. The aim was to break down barriers between citizens and public institutions in the district, to improve social services and facilitate community empowerment. In this project, empowerment evaluation was used as an action research method.

## Action research and the development of more inclusive public institutions

In recent decades, marginalisation and social exclusion have gained some space in the Danish public discourse about the role and functions of the welfare state. Simplified, one can identify two poles within the discussion: one is the criticism of the welfare state from neoliberal and neoconservative positions, claiming that welfare rights (social citizenship) and the redistribution of goods hinders capitalist growth and limits the "trickle down effects" (when the rich get richer wealth "trickles down" to the poor). Furthermore, it creates "a dependency culture" and an "underclass" without a protestant work ethic. The other pole is the criticism emanating from leftist positions, which claims that the "trickle down effect" is a pure ideological construction and argues that neoliberal free market fundamentalism ("market Stalinism") and austerity increases social polarisation. From this position the challenge is to *strengthen* the redistributive capacity of the welfare state and to democratise and humanize existing public welfare institutions, so that citizens in social distress may meet a more participatory, non patronising support.

Despite the political and ideological disagreements, there is, on the surface, some *rhetorical* consensus that the inclusion and participation of citizens are important values in a welfare state. In particular, with reference to the elderly, both state and local governments formulate objectives of active participation and increased influence of older people who receive care in their own homes or in nursing homes (Municipality of Copenhagen 2011).

One thing, however, is the rhetoric of inclusion and participation as guidelines for public welfare institutions. Another is "real politic": the practical challenge of sufficient funding and organisational implementation of such participatory objectives. There is often a tension between the official positive discourses of inclusion and dialogue and the actual achievement of real innovative inclusive practices in the daily lives of welfare institutions.

Bridging the gap between inclusion rhetoric and actual practice in welfare institutions is a challenge for action research. The 'DNA' of the action research tradition is not only the analysis of how the world works, but the mobilisation of knowledge, in co-operation with citizens and social movements, that can change the world in a more just and inclusive direc-

tion. Before we move to the cases we briefly present the roots of the action research tradition in critical theory and sociology.

## Sociological imagination and critical theory

The fundamental idea of the critical theory tradition is that social science should be emancipatory. Societal conditions are studied in order to gain knowledge about barriers to humanization of living conditions and democratisation of society. The Danish sociologist Heine Andersen characterises the overall barriers to humanisation to be societal conditions that restrict individuals' opportunities for a good and decent life, in which individuals can engage in social communities and can act as informed, responsible and consciously acting citizens. (Andersen 1994, p. 201). Going further back in the history of critical theory, the American sociologist C. Wright Mills focused on researchers having a democratic obligation to provide knowledge to citizens so that the latter may be able to hold the power elite accountable for decisions and to identify alternative solutions (Mills 1958, p. 173). In *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1959) Mills argued that research should analyse how everyday "*troubles"* at the individual level (such as everyday life in a nursing home) are linked to overall societal "*issues*" (political, economic and institutional frameworks and conflicts at the macro level) (Mills 1959, p. 211). Ordinary people's "little story" (people's experiences and handling of their living conditions in everyday life), should be linked to the macro development of the society's "big story": transformations of the political, economic and cultural macro context. In this way, Mills argued, researchers should "invite" the sociological imagination into research, and establish a democratic knowledge base for citizens and the public to reflect and act upon (Mills 1959, p. 212). With the concept of sociological imagination, C. Wright Mills argued that social science must be committed to the understanding that some societal conditions are problematic and undesirable, and that the knowledge interest of science must be the gaining of a deeper understanding of societal conditions in order to change them. Thereby Mills distanced himself both from a deterministic understanding of society (claiming that social structures completely determine the individual's actions or scope of action) and from a voluntarist understanding: that life opportunities are mainly the result of people's individual will and actions (Andersen & Hovgaard 2007). Mills stressed that the direction of history's development is not given in advance, but is open to change by human actors. Consequently social science should commit itself to trying to play an active role as a facilitator of democracy by generating knowledge about conditions and opportunities in order to change things in certain desired directions. Thus following C. Wright Mills, research has an obligation to provide documentary and provocative knowledge of how committed citizens and institutions can be empowered to cope with conditions that threaten a democratic, social and economic sustainable development of society.

## Social innovation and empowerment

Empowerment is a concept for progressive change processes and strategies for a more inclusive and democratic society. Empowerment is defined as "the processes through which social groups improve their ability to create, view and control the material, social, cultural and symbolic resources" (Andersen 2005). Historically, the concept of empowerment is connected to the work of Paolo Freire, the Brazilian social scientist who became world famous for his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1974). Freire opposed "Leninist" approaches, where the party leadership acts on behalf of "the oppressed" and emphasised that the task is to facilitate generation of power among citizens themselves. Freire defined empowerment as the ability to understand the social, political and economic contradictions and the ability to act against the oppressing elements of reality (Freire 1974, p.19). In extension of the Latin American action research tradition, the American Professor Richard Levin has developed a broader definition of empowerment. According to Levin's definition, empowerment is the "capacity, resources, information and knowledge, confidence, understanding, organisation and formal rights which humans can utilise individually and collectively to determine what is to happen to them. I also include humans' mobilisation of collective visions and fantasy, intelligence, creativity, enthusiasm, courage and energy in one liberating movement" (Levin 1995, p. 208).

Empowerment is about processes of awareness and capacity building which increase the participation and decision making power of citizens, and which may potentially lead to transformative action which changes opportunity structures in an inclusive and equalising direction (Andersen & Siim 2004). Empowerment has both an objective and a subjective dimension. The objective dimension of empowerment refers to the development of the societal and institutional *opportunity structures* for creating positive changes, (2) the subjective dimension refers to the development of *the ability and capacity* of citizens and collective actors to create positive changes.

In line with Freire's thought, Andersen and Siim (2004) define empowerment as processes through which social groups improve their ability to create, manage and control material, social, cultural and symbolic resources (Andersen & Siim 2004). Action research can facilitate horizontal empowerment processes as well as vertical empowerment processes. Horizontal empowerment processes strengthen trust, commitment and networks between different groups and actors (such as between residents and employees at a nursing home). Vertical empowerment addresses the possibilities of multilevel influence *outwards and upwards*, in relation to power centrrs outside the workplace or local community

### Research committed to social innovation

We define action research as research that contributes to empowerment and social innovation. Action research goes a step further than critically *theorising and analysing* social issues, which was the guideline in, for example, the classical Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006). For action research, the DNA is to contribute actively to positive change in society by generating knowledge about strategies, methods and actions to combat exclusion and disempowerment in various forms. Action research focusses on changing society through collective mobilisation, and this is where the connection to the concept of empowerment lies.

In short, the focal point is that action research links the *understanding* of the world with the *transformation* of the world through citizens' empowerment. Therefore, action research is in conflict with epistemological understandings and research methods (e.g. traditional positivism) which argue for the complete separation of the researcher from the field of the research.

Instead of seeking to ensure that research is performed with objectifying "distance" towards the research field, researchers and practitioners should engage in a joint democratic development of knowledge based on a "shared commitment to democratic social change" (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire 2003).

The Australian action researcher Stephen Kemmis also links action research to critical theory, emphasizing that "the critical" is the combination of identifying injustices, abuses or improper fulfillment of needs and creating a space for critical reflection and resistance to develop and implement positive change strategies. Kemmis distinguishes between "practice", based on the ingrained habits and patterns of action (much in line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus), and the social and collective moral obligation "praxis" that can occur as a result of critical reflection. The aim of participatory action research is to reframe the unreflective habit-based "practice" so that it becomes a collective morally obliging "praxis" (Kemmis 2008, p. 123). Action research gives the participants in the research an opportunity to increase their understanding of their own practices: the individual and collective practices as well as the structural conditions of such practices.

## Methodological diversity in action research

Methodologically, action research is characterised by great diversity, for example quantitative evidence collected by means of questionnaires qualitative interviews, fieldwork etc. may be part of an action research project. The special feature of action research, however, is the explicit aim to develop transformative ideas and visions based on ordinary citizens' human experiences and their aspirations for a better future (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire 2003). The goal is that research contributes to social mobilisation and positive change in the field that action research takes place within.

The knowledge generated through action research is the product of collective processes consisting of:

(1) criticism of unsatisfactory conditions, injustices etc. in a given field,
(2) testing and documentation,
(3) reflection and development of specific visions
(4) strategies for change and collective action (Kemmis, 2008, p. 136).

In the CUAR (Critical Utopian Action Research) tradition'future workshops' and 'research network conferences' have been widely used methods to create a framework for ordinary citizens' social imagination and democratic learning processes (Andersen & Bilfeldt 2015; Egsmose 2015). This kind of participatory action research allows participants to develop greater understanding, both of their own practice and of societal conditions.

Within the future workshop, local stakeholders, citizens and workers, are the driving forces in the production of future visions, actions and scenario building. The method provides an opportunity to think outside the box": to develop utopias that are not limited by the

reality of power in everyday comprehensions of what actually can or cannot be done. A future workshop is organised around plenum and group sessions. The participants' statements are presented and commented upon by using posters. The researchers' role is to act as facilitators (Jungk & Müllert 1987).

The point of departure of an action research project is the *critique phase* where the question is: *What* do we want to change? What is wrong? It involves a brainstorming session aimed at producing critical statements which are listed on posters, and the participants decide (by voting) which of the critical statements are most important.

Then follows the *utopian phase,* framed by the question: Where would we like to go? What's our vision? The participants are asked to be visionary and imagine an alternative work place/nursing home/local community etc. Their utopian visions are listed on posters and commented on. As in the critique phase, the themes are prioritised through voting, in order to find out which utopias/visions should be developed further upon in working groups. The utopia phase ends up with the groups presenting the developed utopias.

Finally, the *realization phase* raises the questions: *How* and with whom can our alternatives become reality? First, the participants are organised into working groups, which are given the task of developing the utopian ideas and turning them into concrete proposals, which are critically commented upon and further developed in a plenary meeting. Second, the groups make agreements about plans of concrete implementation for the future.

## Social innovation

### Example 1: Action Research in nursing homes

The following deals with action research with a group of citizens that may in particular be said to be at risk of exclusion in everyday life: namely senior citizens who rely on the support of nursing homes.

Before the presentation, we briefly summarise the research knowledge about factors that affect the quality of care work in nursing homes and residents' opportunities for self-determination. Even though public elder care in Scandinavia, in an international perspective, is of a high quality, research has shown that there are dilemmas connected to the elder care system. (Meagher & Szebehely (2013) Jönson & Harnett (2015); Hujala, Rissanen & Vihma (2013).

New Public Management (NPM) systems (copied from the private sector) focus on cost reduction and measurability through standardization of services (Hjort 2008). One of the leading Nordic care theorists, Kari Wærness, has with the concept of "rationality of care" focused on the identification with the care recipient's specific needs as the prerequisite for good care (Wærness 1996). Wærness emphasises that an *instrumental* rationality associated with the absence of empathy is pursued in NPM quality management systems (Wærness 2005).

Zebehely and Eliasson-Lappalainen emphasise that the ability to reduce a complex phenomenon such as quality of daily care into standardised measurable indicators implies the risk of creating further standardisation of benefits when employees do not feel that they have actual manoeuvre to let the wishes of the elderly be the starting point for care. If only

measurable results are rewarded, employees are encouraged to adhere to rules and regulations that fit measures. Pressed employees may tend to prioritise commitment to the institution's rules and guidelines, at the expense of a professional and ethical obligation towards the residents and their families (Janlöv, Hallberg & Petersson 2011). Recent research also points out that there is a risk of developing an exclusionary institutional practice, where relatives' are excluded from influence on the care of their elderly relatives (Westin, Ohm & Danielson 2009).

Employees, this may imply that they experience a conflict between personal standards of quality of work and the opportunities to realise them. They may find that resource scarcity and documentation requirements take time from the care that they ought to give. For the elderly, it means a risk that they lose autonomy and influence in everyday life. Research shows that it is crucial for the quality of life in nursing homes that residents feel that their will, desires and habits are respected (Eliasson-Lappalainen 2011, Holmgren et al. 2014).

Both at an individual level (employees, residents and relatives), at an institutional level and at the political and administrative level, it is important that the focus be put on the importance of residents' and their relatives' influence on the care provided at nursing homes. In the following, we discuss how action research in the nursing home sector can contribute to social innovation towards empowerment of both residents, relatives and employees.

## Everyday democracy and social innovation

The action research project *Social Innovation and Everyday Democracy* 2013-2015, dealt with the empowerment of residents in nursing homes. The project focused on the development of residents' democratic influence on everyday life through the strengthening of cooperation between residents, relatives and staff.

The background of the project was that the employees in the nursing home's Cooperation Council had called for a project that focused on the working conditions of the employees, and the lack of satisfaction expressed by residents and relatives. The wider context was that the Municipality of Copenhagen had put everyday democracy on the agenda in elderly care (Municipation of Copenhagen, 2011).

Establishing a democratic and inclusive praxis as the focal point at the nursing home meant that the project should frame the development of an alternative perspective to routine fixation and standardisation of work. The goal of the project was to develop a democratic and inclusive praxis for collaboration to the benefit of the residents/relatives as well as the employees.

The project was organised with the aim of building on experiences and wishes of the employees, the residents and the relatives. The project applied the methodological model described below, with two parallel courses, one for employees and one for residents and relatives. In line with Martha Albertson Fineman (2008), who in her research on vulnerability has highlighted the importance of creating a "space of possibilities" to provide the elderly with a voice in all decision-making processes, this project was organised so that residents and relatives had to participate in group interviews, future workshops and working groups. As recipients of care, their experiences and their wishes for care at the nursing home was to be the cornerstone of the action research project.

After a preparatory phase (Phase 0), the project was executed in three phases of four months each:

Phase 0: (one year) Preparation, such as agreements with the management and employee representatives, residents and relatives, the mapping of information about nursing homes, the defining of the steering committee and the project process etc.

Phase 1: (four months) Group interviews and the presentation of core issues in problem catalogues (one based on group interview with the employees and one based on group interview with residents and relatives).

Phase 2: (four months) Future workshops with critique and vision development, and presentation of results for management.

Phase 3: (four months) Improvement of proposals for action and change initiatives, network conference and networking, and implementation of change strategies.

**Phase 1: Group interviews and Problem Catalogue – in two parallel sessions: one for the employees and one for the residents and relatives**

The following are examples of some of the themes being worked on, having been brought up by either employees or by residents and relatives.

In the group interview with the staff, employees from different departments participated including both day and evening shifts, in order to firmly anchor the project in the nursing home's organisation. The group of residents and relatives that were interviewed was chosen by the manager so as to obtain statements from residents and relatives that were able to express their opinion about what they wanted to change at the nursing home. After the group interviews, the action researchers developed two "problem catalogues", based on issues that had been emphasised respectively by the employees and the residents/relatives.

At the end of the first phase, the interviewees read through the problem catalogue, so that misunderstandings were corrected.

**Phase 2: Future Workshop**

The two day future workshop consisted of a critique phase, a utopian phase and, finally, a realisation phase, where the employees were asked to transform utopias into reality. In the critique phase, the question asked was: What would we like to change? In the utopian phase, the employees formulated their wishes and utopias. In the realisation phase, participants developed suggestions on how to take steps towards utopias, how to put ideas into practice. At the end of the future workshop, a meeting was held at the nursing home where participants supported by the researchers presented their proposals and received responses from colleagues, residents and the Residents Council. Then, thematic task force groups began the second shaping of the presented proposals for action.

**Phase 3: Working with change proposals and establishing a networking conference**

In the final phase, the employees in their thematic groups strived to implement the action proposals to the nursing home every day, as did the residents and relatives in their thematic groups. The third phase also consisted of a networking conference, held during working

hours (spread over two days, 14 days apart) where project participants i.e. employees and residents/relatives presented their utopias and action proposals for invited experts (care researchers, dementia coordinators, municipal staff, politicians and union representatives etc.) to establish a dialogue on how the proposals for action could be improved and ultimately implemented.

The group interview with the employees showed that they experienced everyday life as stressful. In the afternoon there were not enough staff, and there were no unifying activities for the residents. Residents often sat by themselves in their homes, and employees expressed frustration about the lack of social activities. Moreover, co-operation with the relatives was difficult. They lacked time to talk to relatives, additionally several employees actually tried to avoid talking to relatives because they were afraid of being criticised.

The employees reported being pressurised by the conflict between residents' needs and scarce resources. The employees who worked in the afternoon claimed that they did not have a break for eating. The employees felt stressed about not having sufficient time for the required quality documentation. They felt that when relatives saw them sitting in the office in front of the computer, they (the relatives) would become irritated about seeing staff there, when employees were supposed to be caring for the residents. They also claimed to be directly accused by relatives of failing to offer proper care. They did not have sufficient time to talk to relatives and did not know how to handle the critique, which they often found unjustified. In addition, there was reportedly a harsh tone between the employees which they found very stressful.

### Future workshop with the employees

In light of the criticism, the employees developed a number of utopias and social innovative ideas about the quality of care and social life. These included:

Changed work schedules were to provide more social contact between the residents and the staff group.

Dissemination of information between day and evening shifts through daily briefing at shift change would prevent overlooking the acute needs of a resident.

All employees should talk respectfully to each other.

A vision of good co-operation with relatives was developed, in order to set up an action group to develop ideas for such co-operation.

Welcoming relatives and having sufficient time for talking with them.

A vision about having enough time to communicate with residents in the afternoon was developed, and a working group was established to make a proposal regarding changed working schedules and the reorganization of daily routines, which would allow more time in the afternoon. The group found out that if some of the residents would agree to take a bath in the middle of the day, it would be possible to stagger working hours so that some of the employees should not check in until 10 and thereby be able to attend in the afternoon. The employees presented proposals to the management and a pilot scheme with new working schedules was set in motion. An employee referred to experiences with relatives who had experienced inadequate care in a nursing home. An employee told how she tried to meet

relatives' needs by actively asking families about their perspectives and worries. In a horizontal empowerment perspective, the task for employees was to develop proposals that would reduce employee stress in the afternoon, and thereby allow more available resources for resident care. A group decided to work with residents and relatives to develop new approaches to cooperation.

Drawing on Bauman (1989), we can say that technical responsibility was replaced by moral responsibility when an employee referred to her own experiences of powerlessness, and when new ideas emerged to change former unreflective practices. Instead of trying to avoid criticism from relatives, practices to establish an ongoing dialogue with relatives were discussed. This made possible an awareness on the ethical obligation to investigate the needs and voices of relatives. With Kemmis' practice concepts, both modified work schedules and new ideas for co-operation with relatives were expressed with an intention to build a new reflective praxis, that should be responsive and investigative towards residents' and relatives' wishes and needs.

## The residents and relatives

The group interviews with the residents and relatives revealed that they experienced impoliteness from employees who reportedly did not show either relatives or residents sufficient respect. Important input from relatives about residents' care needs were not systematically registered and passed on when guard teams succeeded one another. Relatives stated that employees often lacked knowledge of the individual resident's needs and condition and seemed not to be interested in acquiring such knowledge from relatives. The residents called for more social life and more staff in the afternoon. New residents in particular felt isolated, and they did not know who to turn to. Many had experienced not knowing who to contact, having nobody asking them about how they felt, and not knowing what they were allowed to do in different contexts.

In addition, residents complained about the fact that it was not possible for them to shop without getting help from relatives, who would seek out shops in the immediate vicinity of the nursing home. The residents were not happy to bother family members every time they needed "trifles", such as a weekly paper, a packet of biscuits or milk for coffee.

In the future workshops, residents and relatives also proposed a vision more friendliness from the the employees. The vision included that all information, claims and wishes from relatives and residents would be treated seriously at the nursing home. There was a vision of a welcoming attitude to relatives and a friendly atmosphere when new residents move in and in everyday life when relatives come to visit the residents.

After the realisation phase in the future workshop, a working group of residents was set up, to establish mentoring for new residents. The idea was that current residents should bid newcomers welcome and over the next year follow up on the well-being of the latter. A mentor group for relatives was planned to be settled down. The purpose was to support relatives who experienced problems or needed support to handle dilemmas. In order to get more social life at the nursing home, a task force group was established to prepare a proposal for the establishment of a grocery store at the nursing home, which was also meant to serve as an informal social meeting place for residents.

### Reflection and empowerment

In terms of empowerment, the establishment of a grocery store contains an objective empowerment dimension, in the shape of the possibility of purchasing daily necessities within the premises of the nursing home. Whether a resident walks badly or is a wheelchair user, they could get the possibility to buy their own groceries while being much less dependent on families. Both informal meetings at the grocery store and the establishment of formal mentoring procedures could form the basis for the horizontal empowerment of residents. In the vertical empowerment perspective, the proposal of establishing a grocery store was passed on to the management of the nursing home, who then passed it on to the municipality, who in turn funded what might be the basis for a transformation of everyday life at the nursing home.

The visions for the mentoring programme for newcomers and the grocery store were formed because the residents were empowered and had a voice in the project They wanted to strengthen their autonomy and to create more informal social life with each other. Another initiative was a decision of the relatives to start a monthly "relatives meeting forum" where they could meet, exchange information and lend each other support.

The horizontal empowerment perspective was important for the decision from the two parallel working fora, respectively residents/relatives and employees supported increased confidence and trust between the participants within each group, and the first step was taken towards the development of trust across the groups. As a follow up, at the network conference it was decided to invite the mayor and explain to her that there were too few staff at the nursing home to cope with the tasks. This meeting was followed up by an official letter to the municipality from staff and relatives, where they argued for the need for more staff at the nursing home, which was an important step in a vertical empowerment perspective. The visions developed by the residents and their relatives for creating a climate of mutual respect also increased work life quality for the employees. They were made aware that an ongoing dialogue: between residents, relatives and employees, but also between employees themselves, was indeed crucial.

In a Kemmis perspective (Kemmis 2008, p. 128), the project had framed "a search for justification" through the development of a new praxis of being "sensitive to the views and perspectives of others" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 128). Allowing a decentralised dialogue instead of continuing along the previous line of conflict between employees on the one side and residents and relatives on the other, also opened a more respectful dialogue within the employee group itself :a win/win situation.

## Social innovation

### Example 2: From Library to Community Center Gellerup

In the years 2008–2011, public innovation funds financed the establishment and development of community centers in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods in Denmark. Behind the national programme is a local story in the district of Gellerup (part of Aarhus the second largest City in Denmark and by income the poorest city district in Denmark) about successful social innovation and community empowerment in the interface between volunteering,

neighbourhood networks and public institutions in disadvantaged (and often) multicultural city districts (Andersen, Delica & Frandsen 2013). The key values and purpose of the community centres were, put briefly, to promote empowerment and inclusion of citizens in disadvantaged areas.

Community Center Gellerup (CCG) was the first Danish example of the reinvention of the public library as a holistic, multifunctional community center. In the following, the CCG concept, its form and content, including its international sources of inspiration, will be described. Thereafter, we examine the concept of 'empowerment evaluation' as an example of how action research can facilitate social innovation projects in which different actors and institutions must be mobilised and be committed to create and consolidate a long-lasting organisational model based on key values such as active citizenship and empowerment.

The idea of the Danish community centre is part of an international trend where public libraries reinvent themselves as facilitators of local community empowerment. Internationally, there are similar examples, including in Chicago, in the UK Idea Stores (http://www.ideastore.co.uk/) and in Germany (Delica 2013). CCG has a long history with roots in both an activist and project context in Gellerup, including the EU-funded URBAN project (Andersen 2008). In addition, there has been a long tradition of close cross sectoral collaboration between the public institutions (schools, day care centers, social department etc.).The CCG model consists of:

- Public librarys plus Health, job, education open counselling. These facilities enabling close contact with local citizens and communication between citizens and relevant authorities. Many marginalided citizens feel, for many reasons, alienated from the traditional public institutions and the "contact threshold" in itself is an important mechanism of exclusion. For disadvantaged groups the CCG model means easier ways of communication with public service providers.
- Multisectoral organisation and knowledge sharing across professions and functions. This prevents bureaucratic specialisation and develops professionalism in the direction of holistic trust building vis a vis citizens and thus greater 'accuracy' in relation to citizens' needs and resources. It creates a learning space for cross-sectorial dialogue and skills.
- Cooperation with civil society, NGOs, associations and various groups of volunteers that enable better dialogue, recognition and utilisation of resources.

The Health House was a co-operative effort between Aarhus and Aarhus Midwife Centre. Before the start of the project, health nurses in Gellerup had had good experiences with home visits to families, but had missed a place to gather parents in learning groups, and with scope for an open offer individual guidance. Health House eventually moved in with CCG. Co-ordination promotes interaction between different offers: where the primary purpose of a visit to the health house may be to seek help for a sick child, a library card for the kids might become a side benefit of that visit. Health House has, thus, become part of a larger entity with the ability to combine activities and support events such as seminars on health promotion related topics.

People's Information carries out open and anonymous counseling. The initiative began as voluntary counseling, but because of great demand and successful pressure on the mu-

nicipality, it was possible to hire three counselors. Counseling is provided on social issues, education, citizenship and residence, social services, etc. in close co-operation with the relevant authorities. Therefore, the staff often acts as "lawyers" and conflict managers between residents and administrations. Over the years, the Peoples Information has been recognised by the City of Aarhus as a competent and necessary sparring partner.

An important purpose of CCG was to better facilitate citizens' activities. This means that citizens in the local area may go to CCG to test an idea, and the CCG may engage in co-operation on that idea with the network or association represented by the citizens. There have been teaching courses in community understanding and Danish courses for women; there have been seminars on health, IT and open learning; one-day schools and boarding schools. There have been events on controversial issues such as crime and Khat abuse held by young Somalis, an annual "Clean Ghetto" project (concerts against vandalism in the area), discussion evenings concerning Palestine, and teambuilding for young men and women in the role model group Youth for Youth: these are merely examples to show the scope of ideas and events.

CCG was an example of a 'holistic' and multifunctional community center. CCG reached beyond the local community by working with the development of common skills, methods and values and the exemplary interaction between users, volunteers and staff. CCG may be seen as an example of social innovation, the actors being employees, volunteers and ordinary citizens who have set themselves the task of developing the quality of not only the existing types of public services for citizens, but also the democratic involvement of residents and voluntary organizations in cross-sectorial, holistic reforms in a number of areas, which have hitherto often been isolated from each other; health, homework, open counseling, job search and library functions.

CCG is an example of how public libraries can be transformed into community centres that may become institutional actors in local community building and empowerment, and contribute to democratisation, better resource utilisation and quality of the public sector, in close interaction with civil society. Community centers allow for synergies, as the employee on the one hand becomes more flexible by working across professional boundaries, and as citizens, on the other hand, are experiencing more efficient and straightforward contact with the public system. Multi-sector and civil society absorbing platforms of a CCG-type requires, in addition to resources for development, both dedicated professionals and active volunteer environments. Furthermore, it requires political and administrative facilitation from above. The budgeting and governance procedures of public institutions are still system barriers to be overcome in order for the citizen-driven social innovation to become part of a long-term sustainable development path.

During the evaluation, CCG employees reported that knowledge sharing has improved as employees refer to and use each other's expertise when in touch with citizens, for example in relation to health, job searching and language difficulties. Implementing more flexible workflows and having employees become better at using each other's qualifications may even be stress-reducing. For citizens, it is about the advantage of a more flexible and efficient contact with different parts of the public systems and in relation to relevant voluntary organizations (Delica 2013), where one may contact or be referred to another person without having to make a separate appointment, etc. This is particularly important in areas with

many disadvantaged citizens who may often be sceptical of whether public institutions can in fact be of use when solving one's problems.

## Empowerment evaluation (EA)

The evaluation was based on the kind of action research called empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 2001). EA is rooted in the tradition of community development (community work) and action research, and is also related to various forms of participatory evaluation. EA differs from 'top-down' evaluation where goals and criteria for projects and their evaluation are defined by political or economic decision-makers. The problem with evaluations that are primarily controlled from 'outside' is that they are not always productive in relation to the hands-on quality of organisations and projects, and do not take into account the practical challenges that must be handled. The learning that takes place in practice may be more or less invisible in 'top-down' evaluations. Therefore, EA has emerged as a critique of such 'top down' approaches.

## The role of a critical facilitator

Objectives and criteria aim, unlike traditional top-down approaches, at starting at the bottom of the hierarchy, with employees and their own visions, goals and problem perceptions. EA is, thus, more than an external measurement of a project's fulfillment. The evaluation aims to support the development of organisations from inside and from underneath. In EA, the evaluator sometimes functions as a critical 'facilitator'. The facilitator's task may be to help identify dilemmas, articulate visions and goals, prioritise tasks in relation to given resources, provide project participants with the tools to better co-ordinate and share knowledge, and inspire through the presentation of good practices from elsewhere.

Fetterman and Wandersman define the approach as follows: "Empowerment evaluation is an evaluation approach that aims to increase the likelihood that projects meet their goals through increasing project participants' ability to plan, implement and evaluate their own projects" (Fetterman & Wandersman 2005, p. 27).

## Capacity Building

Within EA, there is a goal of 'capacity building'. EA "is designed to help people help themselves and improve their projects through self-evaluation and reflection" (Fetterman, 2001, p. 3). The goal is, to strengthen organisations and projects, both internally and with external stakeholders, by making frontline workers and citizens build capacity for themselves to do and use their own evaluations.

*'Internal capacity building'* means that organisations and citizens become better at developing and improving their practice, thus achieving the better their objectives and results. The goal is to incorporate, so to speak, evaluation in the general operating procedures of the organisation:

"Inventories of a project's value and utility are not evaluation endpoint: as it often is in a traditional evaluation, but is part of a continuing project improvement process. [...] Both statements of a project's value and the resulting consistent proposals for project improvement: developed by the group with the help of a trained facilitator, are subject to a cyclic

reflection and self-evaluation process. Project participants learn continuously to take stock of their progress towards self-determined goals and reshape their plans and strategies based on this statement" (Fetterman 2001, p. 3-4).

*'External capacity building'* means that organisations and projects become better at formulating their visions, goals and problem perceptions and at visualising and documenting their findings to external stakeholders such as policy makers and economic supporters. Empowerment evaluation may be seen as a symbolic empowerment in and with citizens and frontline workers at the 'bottom of the hierarchy', who achieve greater power to define the criteria for assessing whether a project may be recognised as relevant and valuable and therefore should be allocated resources. In empowerment evaluation, the evaluator may also act as a 'lawyer' by using symbolic capital to legitimise citizens' and front-line workers' alternative criteria in the face of demands put forth by political decision makers (Andersen & Frandsen 2007).

## Accountability and transparency

Focusing on participants' learning processes does not imply that the requirement for documentation and 'measurement' of project progress and fulfillment disappears. The EA also operates with a goal of 'transparency' or 'accountability', obtained by the ongoing documentation of results. An important part of capacity building is, thus, to increase organisations' capacity to 'keep accounts' of their progress, both in order to strengthen themselves internally (through the continuous adjustment and development of the project) and in order to communicate with external political and economic authorities and decision makers.

In relation to 'financial viability', the action researcher/empowerment evaluator may act as an expert who helps participants to identify the type of "evidence" required to document the project's fulfillment. Although empowerment evaluation basically has a 'bottom-up' approach, it does not mean that external stakeholders are not involved.

## The practical action research design

The first task was to prepare a design for the action research process. A course was designed so that both employees and CCG management could take ownership, and become involved in the formulation of objectives and evaluation criteria. This included the clarification of resources in terms of time and professional skills available. As part of the goal of 'capacity building', the development of simple methods of self-evaluation was included in the evaluation design, including a small questionnaire and spreadsheet where employees could indicate whether in the previous period they had recorded progress, stagnation or decline in relation to the stated measurements of success (Andersen & Frandsen 2007).

The process was divided into three stages. The first phase was about formulating a 'baseline' and evaluation criteria (six months). The task here was to facilitate the formulation of a common vision and a 'baseline' (a description of the situation at the outset). The second phase lasted 18 months. Here, the focus was on process facilitation and the support of project implementation and delivery. Besides regular sparring with the project manager and the organisation of seminars in cooperation with employees, evaluation tools were de-

veloped in the form of a standard set of records and a user survey. Furthermore, a midterm seminar was offered and a mid-term review with adjusted goals and success criteria was prepared. The third phase lasted about three months. During this phase, stock was taken of the project terms. In co-operation with the management and employees, preparations were made to implement a model for anchoring the future operation and continued development of the Community Centre. As part of the final evaluation, a pilot user survey was also conducted to test the developed questionnaire. As mentioned initially, the project managed subsequently to move beyond "the trap of localism" because the CCG model became the basis for a nationwide program.

## Prospects and ethical challenges

The purpose of the two examples presented here was to change organizational culture, values and working methods in order to facilitate citizens' empowerment and, in effect, bring the welfare state services and profession closer to citizens' needs. The goal in both cases was to eliminate or modify various forms of exclusion by promoting the organisation and the employees' capacity to support concrete empowerment of citizens in everyday life. We see two challenges for action research inspired approaches in relation to social innovation in welfare and cultural institutions.

The first challenge is about the structural opportunity structures. In relation to the political and administrative system, the main challenge is the composite nature of political and administrative systems, making cross-sectorial work difficult. The challenge is to facilitate innovative forms of organisation, such as multifunctional community centres, and make them visible as relevant structures rather than seeing them as special exceptions: it is about recognising the value of nursing home level social innovation from below, rather than bureaucratic NPM models. In this context, it is also, a challenge to develop evaluation tools that may bridge the gap between different ways of understanding and legitimising social efforts (see the criticism of the so-called New Public Management regime in the Danish public sector, too).

Within the action research tradition it has always been discussed how empowering practices can become entrenched beyond the local level (Gustavsen 2003) . Thus, the international research on social innovation and empowerment indicates that there is a danger of falling into *the trap of localism*, where successful social innovations: instead of being *up-scaled* and widely distributed, end up as one-offs or simply die out at the very local level (Osterlynck & Debruyne 2013, p. 10-11). It is important to pay attention to the vision, experiments and learning that occur at the micro level, disseminating it so that it may form the basis for the development of creative strategies of change at the meso and macro levels.

The second challenge is about managing dilemmas in practical action research. As we have illustrated, action research forms the basis for breaking down cultures of silence, where residents and relatives, abstain from raising criticism, which might otherwise contribute to the empowerment of residents and staff. A way of inviting and benefitting from criticism is by developing weekly democratic practices for residents' participation in daily as well as more long-term decisions in nursing homes. But, as pointed out by Gaventa and Cornwell (2008), although action research participation methods aim to promote democratic knowledge development, there may still be a risk of power abuse. Also Brydon-Miller

stresses the importance of focusing on the ethical challenges associated with action research projects in which unequal power relations are present. Brydon-Miller points out that "too often the role of power is overlooked in contexts of action research" and she stresses the importance of "examining the ethical challenges involved in doing research in settings of highly unequal power" (Brydon-Miller 2008, p.207).

In nursing homes, one will find a structural, unequal balance of power between staff and residents, as residents are dependent upon receiving care by the employees (Holmgren et al. 2014. No matter how positive the intentions of action research may be, there will always be a risk that dystopias and "negative change initiatives" that are not in residents' interest become dominant (for example the defense of a culture among colleagues of allowing that calls from "troublesome" residents are not answered during coffee breaks and private talks between employees). Therefore, creating "free space" for discussion is not enough. Workshops must challenge what Kemmis terms "unreflective habit-based practices", characterised by inertia, ingrained routines and (semi) authoritarian attitudes, if progressive change is to succeed.

**Note**: Thanks for useful comments from referees.

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# How to reconcile work and university studies – An action research case from Finland

*Satu Kalliola, Jukka Niemelä and Ossi Eskelinen*

**Abstract**
University traditions are confronted by continuous global competition and are challenged to provide a larger and faster highly educated labour force. On the other hand, many adult students work along their studies which prolong earning their degrees. The study explores the perspectives of employers and students, teachers and student advisors coming from two University Consortia, on the need to reconcile work and studies, and on the potential practices to do that. The research setting is that of Action Research applying Democratic Dialogue. The study examines the dialogues of all participant groups, action plans made, practical outcomes after five years of a dialogue based intervention and the learnings about the method used. The study concludes that instead of study-friendly practices at the workplaces, the universities are adopting work-friendly practices, including e-learning, to support their students. The dialogue based method proved to be malleable enough to capture the diverse ideas of participants.

**Keywords**: Democratic Dialogue, action research cycle, adult students, reconciling work and studies

**Cómo conciliar trabajo y estudios universitarios – Un caso de investigación-acción de Finlandia**

**Resumen**
Las tradiciones universitarias se ven confrontadas por una competencia global continua y son desafiadas a proporcionar, de forma rápida, una mayor fuerza de trabajo con una excelente formación. Por otro lado, muchos estudiantes adultos trabajan a lo largo de sus estudios y los prolongan para obtener su grado. El estudio explora las perspectivas de empleadores y estudiantes, profesores y consejeros estudiantiles provenientes de dos Consorcios Universitarios, sobre la necesidad de conciliar el trabajo y los estudios, y sobre las prácticas potenciales para hacer eso. El escenario de investigación es el de la Investigación-Acción aplicando el Diálogo Democrático. El estudio examina los diálogos de todos los grupos participantes, los planes de acción realizados, los resultados prácticos después de cinco años de intervención basada en el diálogo y los aprendizajes sobre el método utilizado. El estudio concluye que en lugar de prácticas de estudio amigable en los lugares de trabajo, las universidades están adoptando prácticas de trabajo amigable, incluyendo la educación a distancia, para apoyar a sus estudiantes. El método basado en el diálogo demostró ser lo suficientemente maleable como para captar las diversas ideas de los participantes.

**Palabras clave**: Diálogo Democrático, ciclo de investigación-acción, estudiantes adultos, conciliación de trabajo y estudios

## Introduction

The traditions of higher education institutions are confronted in many ways by continuous global economic competition. Higher education institutions are expected to contribute to the improvement of the competitive edge of nations. This claim is supported for example by the expansion of higher education, providing more a qualified workforce although the rapid changes in the economy challenge the notion of qualifications leading to lasting careers (Brooks & Everett 2009). Also, the transformation of universities in Europe, and worldwide, towards the entrepreneurial university (Sam & van der Sijde 2014) is one aspect of higher education contributing to the national economic growth. However, also other perspectives have been presented. Kauppinen (2012) argues that emergent collaboration between transnational corporations and research universities gives rise to intermediate organisations and that these phenomena challenge the notion of the universities as being primarily promoters of national economic competitiveness.

In Finland, there are also more levels of economic competition, namely regional and local. University Consortia are one way to take part in this competition. They are network organisations that bring academic activities of their region together and co-operate with regional and local actors. In their efforts to accelerate economic growth, and in some cases also in internationalisation, their main asset is raising the level of education. Some of them offer bachelor and doctoral level education, although the emphasis is on the Open University studies and continuing education in the form of master's degree programmes catered to mature-age students. (University Consortia 2013) As many of them have families and full-time jobs when enrolling in further study, the issues of students working are among important topics discussed at the Finnish University Consortia.

It is hardly an overstatement that higher education institutions are expected to give their input also to the lengthening of working careers, which is seen as a must in ageing western societies. This presents a task to prevent the prolonging and abandoning of studies (Mäkinen, Olkinuora & Lonka 2004) and to accelerate the speed of earning a degree, leading to early entry into the labour market. In the debate on education policy in Finland, where there are no tuition fees in higher education, student employment has been suggested to be one of the main reasons why students prolong their studies (Saari, Mikkonen & Vieno 2013).

Although dependent on the cycles of the economy and the fluctuating demand of a highly educated labour force, the final decision to complete, or not complete, studies are made by students individually. Encouragement, and sometimes pressure, to enforce these decisions, may take place in the form of new legislation and government level steering, followed by university level development activities and projects, and by study-friendly practices of the employers. They could resemble family-friendly practices recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The family-friendly practices may include a large selection of arrangements regarding work and working hours or situation-bound flexibility (OECD Family Database). Respectively, the study-friendly practices, supported by study-friendly organisation culture, could contain many type of working time arrangements, human resource practices in study leaves, and rewards after the completion of studies, as well as fair rules and instructions at a workplace.

The context of this study is one publicly funded project that aimed to accelerate the completion of studies at two university consortia. The objective of the study is to shed light on the perspectives of adult learners, their teachers and student advisors, as well as the representatives of employers, of the need, possibilities and means to reconcile university study and work. Also the setting of the study, an application of Democratic Dialogue (Gustavsen 1991; Gustavsen 2001) in Dialogue Workshops is under investigation.

## The research background and development initiatives

Some Finnish universities are members of more than one University Consortium. This is the case of University Consortia A and B (UCA and UCB) that from time to time work together. UCA has an active Student Association (SA), which is a member of The National Union of University Students in Finland, the main interest organisation for student grants and new developments in higher education policies. Already in 2007, SA, together with Students' Wellbeing Taskforce, had initiated Students' Wellbeing Survey (reported by Salonen & Suntila, 2008) and invited the authors to assist in reflecting on required action to alleviate the problems revealed. Two findings were chosen for further reflection and workshops applying Democratic Dialogue (Gustavsen 2001) were organised to address the wellbeing problems of the first year students ("*Supporting the students in the beginning of their studies")*, and the students' perspectives on their future working life and careers in the region ("*To stay on the region or to leave?)*.These were reported together as Dialogue Workshops DW2008 to the participants. The survey resulted also in a notion that a significant part of the first year students were actually adult learners with practical problems in the reconciliation of studies, family and work (Salonen & Suntila 2008). This aspect was included in a European Social Fund project *"Networked Skill Creation – Collaboration between University and Working Life in Accelerating Academic Studies"* involving both UCA and UCB in 2009 – 2012 and led by one the member university of UCA. Adult Students' Wellbeing survey was included in the project in 2011 and again, SA and Students' Wellbeing Taskforce collaborated with the authors to organize in 2012 a Dialogue Workshop that is to be analysed more closely.

## Democratic Dialogue combined with Lewinian Action Research Cycle in Dialogue Workshops

As mentioned above, the student actors of UCA wanted to try how action research (AR) could contribute to their situation. This is a practical notion in our era of realising societal aims by development programmes and projects. The practicality of AR refers to its twofold role as a means to conduct interventions whilst simultaneously gathering data. The AR approach used in this research is a combination of the classic Lewinian Action Research Cycle ARC (1948) and the continuously evolving Nordic model of dialogue based methods of workplace innovation (Gustaven & Engelstad 1986; Gustavsen 1991; Alasoini 2008; Gensby 2014). The Dialogue aspect is seen as a mean to enhance the value orientation of

action research, as well as wide participation of those concerned. It may transform the Lewinian Action Research Cycle from "social engineering", as Lewin (1948) himself puts it, towards participatory action research, PAR (Reason & Bradbury 2001) and also towards normative planning and normative action research, characterised by the involvement of stakeholders, and advocated for example by Baburoglu and Ravn (1992).

All phases of the action research cycle (diagnosis of the problem to be solved as a basis for the future to be created, initiating action, evaluating the effects of the action, and taking new action) can be carried out in a participatory and dialogical manner in cooperation with concerned parties, including stakeholders from other organizations. Forms of AR that deploy dialogue forums, such as Dialogue Conferences, were adopted in Finland from other Scandinavian countries. They have been used for example in Finnish municipalities since 1991 (Kalliola & Nakari 1999) and are often called as Work Conferences. According to the basic design of Dialogue Conferences, they are conducted as an interplay of dialogues in small groups and plenaries, and the participants are advised to follow the criteria of Democratic Dialogue (Gustavsen & Engelstad 1986; Gustavsen 2001). Dialogue is differentiated from discussion by emphasising a two-way communication, a matter of giving and taking, and by the objectives to generate and to concretize potentials for joint action (Gustavsen 2001). From a pragmatic point of view, it is a matter of expressing one's perspectives, based on personal work experience, listening, being heard, learning from others, and changing words into action (Kalliola, Nakari & Pesonen 2006; Kalliola 2009).

As Democratic Dialogue firstly aims to give a voice to all stakeholders, and secondly, to gather these voices together to obtain an understanding of how the connections between relevant factors are viewed by the stakeholders, there is a possibility of the theory of organisation becoming local (Gustavsen 1991; Elden 1983). Weick (1995) refers to this type of reasoning as sense making in organisations. Getting to know how an organisation is perceived by all stakeholder groups can foster a local theory of change. A researchers' input to this process would be that of theoretical knowledge and of governing a change process that would help to conceptualise the present as well as the desired future of the organisations in question. In the evolving practice of dialogue based AR, the role of the researchers has often been that of facilitators.

In the UCA & UCB setting, the conduct of Dialogue Conferences had to be minimised to half a day and were therefore called Dialogue Workshops. In the programme the design of dialogue conferences (Gustavsen & Engelstad 1986) was constrained by limited time and was adapted to the following phases: a presentation of the results of Adult Students Well-being Survey, dialogues based on these results, and possible action planning, plenaries, and a closing discussion. The title "*The added value of studying employees: Are they assets/ special resources of their employers?"* was formulated by SA and the authors to attract especially the interest of employers, who were invited among the alumni and private and public organisations recruiting students as their practical trainees. The invitation included the programme of the workshop, a briefing about the method and the criteria for Democratic Dialogue.

Twenty-six individuals responded positively and participated in the workshop in February 2012. Their grouping was based firstly on the genuinely homogenous position of being either a student, a teacher, a student advisor or an employer. The second dialogues were

conducted in branch specific groups of Business, Creative Business, Public Services and Technology.

The groups were advised to elect a secretary to summarise the dialogues on overhead projector slides/flip board paper and a presenter to convey the main points to the other groups in a plenary to follow. For further studies, the dialogues were tape recorded by resource persons who were prepared to take notes, in case of technological problems. The researchers visited all the groups reminding of the application of Democratic Dialogue. The researchers documented the inputs given in the plenaries and closing discussion to the field notes. All the presented documents of the Workshop were compiled in their original form to a protocol type of report (DW2012) that was delivered to all participants and the organisers.

## Defined research questions, data, analysis and reporting in ARC framework

The main interest of this study lies in the Dialogue Workshop "*The added value of studying employees: Are they assets/special resources of their employers?"* and the contributions of it to the participants, when viewed and evaluated in retrospect, after five years, and to further the understanding of the application of Democratic Dialogue in small scale workshops. Defined research questions rise from the theme of Dialogue Workshop in 2012 and the method applied.

Thematic analysis:

1. What was the overall theme of the experiences of the UCA and UCB students with respect to the relationship between study and work as assessed by the Adult Student Wellbeing Survey?
2. How did the various stakeholder groups interpret the theme(s) in the 2012 Dialogue Workshop? What were the similarities and the differences in the main concerns of the various groups in the matter of reconciling studies and work?

Action plans:

3. Were there any shared initiatives established that could be further developed in the 2012 Dialogue Workshop?

Follow-up and learning from evaluation:

4. What initiatives of the 2012 Dialogue Workshop were carried out and acted upon and why?
5. What could be learned about the AR method?

In order to derive answers to the research questions, diverse data is combined to construct a comprehensive interpretation of the AR approach used in UCA and UCB development initiatives.

Data from Adult Students Well Being Survey data in 2011 was analysed mainly by cross tabulations (labour market position of the students as the independent variable) and

tested by $\chi^2$ -test as mainly statistically significant ($p<0,05$). The main conclusions of cross tabulations are presented in the section of Diagnosis and are followed by group dialogues interpreting their practical meaning to the participant groups. The report of Students' Well-being Survey in 2007 (Salonen & Suntila 2008) is referenced as background information.

The ARC based report continues by presenting the action planning phase both in dialogues and closing discussion and proceeds towards evaluation. Data consists of Dialogue Workshop Reports (DW2008 and DW2012) and the Final Report of ESF-project "*Networked Skill Creation …*" (ESF 2013). These are protocols, compiled in Finnish, containing no interpretations, and are used along the researchers' field notes to secure the chronological presentation of the events belonging to the ARC. The data used in the evaluation comes from current websites of the member universities of UCA and UCB and from the researchers' observations.

As Dialogue Workshop in 2012 is the main intervention under investigation, the original documentation of all group dialogues and plenaries were translated into English. The qualitative analysis was a combination of theme based and data-driven approach (Ylijoki & Mäntylä 2003). The theme based analysis was guided by the research questions and proceeded from dialogue assignments towards group specific perspectives. The data driven approach allowed some new aspects to emerge in the results. All the other data was analysed in the Finnish language, and translation took place only when needed in constructing this article.

## The Action Research Cycle of Dialogue Workshop "The added value of studying employees: Are they assets/special resources of their employers?"

### Diagnosis

The 2007 Students' Well-being Survey (Salonen & Suntila 2008) emphasised the difficulty adult students have reconciling the different spheres of their lives, especially with respect to working and studying. Nevertheless, one of the main findings was that for students over 40 years old, studying was an important resource, not a source of stress; they reported hardly any health related symptoms connected to their studies, no feelings of loneliness, and reported that the Region was a pleasant place to live and they were satisfied with their income. In the Adult Students' Wellbeing Survey (2011), the items were formulated more deeply to assess core issues in studying, working and family life. In the opening of the subsequent Dialogue Workshop (2012), the results of the new survey were presented as slides to the participants. In addition to the results concerning work and studies, some family life variables were covered from the point of view of conflicts and stress (reported in Finnish by Niemelä, 2014).

Altogether 363 students completed the questionnaire, which was available both in electronic and paper format. The response rate is impossible to count, since the universities do not gather information about their students' labour market and marital status.

The major part of the respondents (40%) were working full-time, 17% were working part-time and 17% on leave from work, leaving the remaining 26% as full-time students.

Also the majority of all respondents (67%) felt that studying was the most neglected sphere of their life. Students working full-time reported that their time spent studying averaged 17 hours and working 37 hours each week. When asked for the main reason that they did not spend more time studying, 67% of students working full-time reported it was their work.

The responses to questions about the importance of these two areas of life, work and studies, were the following:

Most of the students working full-time found the role of their work to be of significant importance (75%), and felt very committed to their present work (73%), while over half of students engaged in part-time work or on leave from work felt that their work merely served to provide a daily income. Additionally, the joy and fulfilment derived from work was more heavily reported among the students engaged in full-time work over the other groups. In accordance, with students working full-time reportedly valuing the role of work in their lives highly, the role of studying was valued less than that of the other groups. Conversely, over half of students engaged in part-time work agreed that study was the most important thing in their lives. When asked to consider what areas outside of work are most heavily compromised by studying, participants reported strongly other areas than work: household duties (52%), free time (51%), exercise or outdoor recreation (47%), and family relationships (44%).

Students working full-time really do this, since 84 % of them study totally using free time from work whereas a majority of the students working part-time (71%), have an official part-time working contract because of their studies. On the other hand, students working full-time have a higher level of arrangements to study during the regular working day than students working part-time, which corresponds with the type of their contracts. They may be allowed to leave the work place in the middle of the regular working day, start working later than the regular working day starts, or to leave work earlier than the regular working day ends, take whole days as free, and change bonus holiday pay for days off. As a whole, the contents of the agreements between the employers and the working students seem to be diverse. The agreements form the basis to support the reconciling work and studying, and represent thus examples of study-friendly practices at the workplace.

According to the principles of Democratic Dialogue PAR the organisers of the workshop did not emphasise any of the results presented over the others. The short plenary discussion made two conclusions:

1. Although studying is recognised as an important part of the students' lives, it is often also the most neglected area in the lives of employed students.
2. The students connect with their employers and their universities, but the latter two do not meet. (Researchers' notes.)

The questions to be reflected in the first group dialogue were the following: Do the results of Adult Students Wellbeing Survey constitute a problem, and do we need to solve it? What are the needs and hopes of various actor groups, when considering the issue of reconciling studies and work? What would be the desirable future of reconciling studies and work? The results of the dialogues by homogenous groups are presented in Figure 1.

| Homogenous Group (n) | **Students (8)** |
|---|---|
| Needs and Hopes | Flexibility in Studies, Working life and Family life |
| Elements of Desirable Futures | Web, compensation of absences, diverse ways to take courses Positive attitude of the employer<br>= Flexible arrangements and optimal choices will take place |
| Prerequisites and / or Constraints | Motivation to study must be strong, since it is a matter of giving up one's personal life<br>Listening to only good advice |

| Homogenous Group (n) | **Employers (6)** |
|---|---|
| Needs and Hopes | Flexibility<br>Theoretical vs. Practical knowledge<br>Transfers: from studies to work and from work to studies<br>Openness; Interaction; Internationalization |
| Elements of Desirable Futures | Hours spent in studies could be corresponded with working hours.<br>Continuous learning is called for.<br>An adult learner is more open for new ideas.<br>Sharing the profits (gains) of studies<br>Getting familiar with other cultures |
| Prerequisites and / or Constraints | Needed both form the employer and the university<br>Field of studies counts<br>Adult learners are more open to new ideas.<br>Students' commitment to their jobs<br>Organization culture counts<br>This is a "must". |

| Homogenous Group (n) | **Teachers (6)** |
|---|---|
| Needs and Hopes | |
| Elements of Desirable Futures | Students having jobs enrich the communities of studying<br>Students' attitudes: most are very motivated |
| Prerequisites and / or Constraints | Contact teaching is planned for full time students<br>Studying is supposed to be the number one priority in the life of a university student<br>The pace of studies is low<br>Learning at work is not taken into account<br>Compensating absences = extra work load<br>There exists only little e-teaching<br>Students' attitudes: part of the students want only formal qualifications<br>Students' expectations: (High) Standard of living,<br>Híigh quality of teaching (expressed especially by students having a job) |

| Homogenous Group (n) | **Student Advisors (6)** |
|---|---|
| Needs and Hopes | Flexibility |
| Elements of Desirable Futures | Equality must prevail<br>Students take the responsibility of their studies |
| Prerequisites and / or Constraints | Limits to flexibility:<br>The provider of the education should not allow too much variation in the modes to earn study points within one course or curriculum<br>Students acquire relevant information and plan their studies<br>Attitude, motivation and the degree of commitment to studies are crucial |

*Figure 1*: Diagnosis based on the Adult Students Well-being Survey by homogenous groups

In the students' responses were references to the quality of life as a whole, as interpreted from the diverse, and also conflicting time perspectives of academic work by Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003). The encouragement to make optimal choices corresponds with timeless time, referring to internally motivated and self-controlled use of time, and to personal time (referring to one's temporality and the roles of studies, work and families in it). The other time perspectives are scheduled time (working according to externally imposed and controlled timetables) and contracted time, featuring a sense of time as something that is terminating combined with an uncertainty about the future. (Ibid.)

The teachers' position seems to be almost in total opposition towards the needs and hopes expressed by the students. The teachers were the only group that actually presented no visions of a desirable future about the issue under discussion, but rather saw any changes as constraints to keep things as they used to be. In fact, the teachers' presentation appeared to defend the traditional university model – that in Finland used to be Humboldtian (Sam & van der Sidje 2014): and also the traditional working conditions of the teachers against the new demands.

When interpreting that having a job is for students a mean to keep up a certain standard of living, the teachers might be right. In their research on the subsistence of tertiary students in different life situations Mikkonen, Lavikainen & Saari (2013) have shown that taking out a student loan is the clearest indication of a low level of subsistence, whereas employment is a predictor of a high level of subsistence. According to the above-mentioned research, students who have taken out a student loan find that the loan has advanced their academic progress only marginally. Further, the students see a loan primarily as a solution to problems of time management, and only secondly to problems that pertain to subsistence. On the other hand, adult students seem to take study leaves, or sabbaticals, quite seldom and prefer organising their lives without the support of adult students' grants. However, parallel to the teachers' interpretation about the significance of jobs in delivering steady income, there is the realm of jobs as a significant meaning of life.

The student advisors took their position as mediators between the opposing needs of the students and the teachers. The emphasis on equality can been seen as an important criterion of the outermost limit of flexibility.

The employers' perspective can be interpreted at the same time as that of a proactive leader (interaction and internationalization needed) and of a cautious human research manager (what type of knowledge is needed) is a studying student worth the costs?). The idea of the shared flexibility between the employers and the university can be seen as one example of negotiation result, typical for labour market bargaining.

In the plenary, unanimity of the significance of the students' motivation to study and the need of flexibility were emphasised, although the teachers presented the latter only as an expectation of the students. The current status of the university as "a regular day time organisation" was seen as a basic kind of a problem to be solved on the way towards flexibility. (Researchers' notes.)

In the branch specific dialogues, no clear differences between Creative Business, Business, Technology and Public Services could be traced. Conversely, the groups were similar in their attitude to demand nothing from the employers. Only Business presented the idea of graduation as a prerequisite for permanent jobs and also lower pay before graduation. This

practice would affect mostly the students themselves, not the employers, and would not be applicable in cases, where the students work permanently in branches differing from their studies. Altogether, the emphasis was on flexibility and student counselling (see figure 2). Despite this unanimity the plenary discussion was vivid. Topics included a true need to strengthen the connections between the employers and the society as a whole, and enhanced student counselling as a necessity in delivering the message of the demands of studying at a university. (DW 12; Researchers' notes).

| Branch Croup (n) | **Creative Business (6)** |
|---|---|
| Immediate Action | Ground rules to be communicated to the students |
| Future Action | More contact teaching in the evenings and during the weekends and more diversity in the modes to take courses<br>More contacts between the university and the employers |
| Constraints | Enhanced flexibility increases the need for new resources<br>The employers do not recognize the added value of their studying employees<br>Greater support needed from the society (better students grants)<br>Greater support needed from the employers |

| Branch Croup (n) | **Business (6)** |
|---|---|
| Immediate Action | The students must be the most flexible part of the equation in reconciling studies and work<br>Improving student counselling |
| Future Action | More courses on-line and as Open University modules in the evenings<br>No permanent jobs to students before the completion of studies; raise in the pay after the Master's degree |
| Constraints | |

| Branch Croup (n) | **Technology (7)** |
|---|---|
| Immediate Action | More information: Ground rules to be communicated to the students<br>More flexibility: E-learning and Moodle |
| Future Action | |
| Constraints | The best potential of interaction, "the flavor" of contact teaching is missed on-line<br>Doubts about the successful transfer of the students' responsibilities to "the home atmosphere" |

| Branch Croup (n) | **Public Services (7)** |
|---|---|
| Immediate Action | Teaching Schedules to be published as early as possible, which paves the way to the use of Flexi-time<br>The recognition of earlier studies should be made clear in the very beginning of the studies<br>City of X Practice: two days per month free for students studying to be qualified social workers |
| Future Action | |
| Constraints | The practice may not hurt the rights of flexibility of non-studying work force; the practice is too dependent on the demand of qualified social workers; in case of oversupply no free time allowed |

*Figure 2*: Summary of branch specific action plans.

The students furthered their discussion on optimal choices presented in the first dialogue, addressing the idea of study as a privilege and as an opportunity to learn new things. It may be that the students were more likely to use their own time for studies. In the frame of ref-

erence of the diverse time perspectives of academic work (Ylijoki & Mäntylä 2003), this can be interpreted as a delight of getting immersed in their studies.

The presentation of Creative Business was discussed further from the teachers' perspectives:

1) the diversifying of the schedules and ways to complete courses will require more resources to the universities,
2) more ample student grants might help to keep up "the regular daytime organisation".

Also the Public Sector presentation aroused some new perspectives:

1) the students may not want their employer to support their studies since they do not want to get tied to a single employer,
2) the employers had generally broken the earlier social/collective and psychological/individual contracts that had maintained the employees' loyalty and
3) many students see studying new things as a privilege and do not want to get all the parts of the curricula to be compensated by earlier studies or knowledge.

## Planning the action: closing discussion and emergent action plans

In the closing discussion, the participants expressed no need to return to the theme of the extra resources originally emphasised by the teachers and, later, the Creative Business group; this also neglected the students' demand for more diverse teaching schedules and the opinion of Business group that obliged the students themselves to be the most flexible partner. Instead, the latter idea was adopted in a milder formulation with *securing the motivation and responsibility of the students themselves* presented as one of the action steps to be taken. Parallel to that, *the communication of the ground rules* kept its place as an important activity, acting as a mediating practice between the perspectives of the students desires for increased flexibility, and the teachers desires to keep the things as they were; it is also a practical implication of the student advisors' perspective of stressing a moderate way to be flexible. The other activities to be taken included *the improvement of student counselling, the development of e-learning*, and *building more contacts between the universities and the employers*. (DW2012, 9-10.)

The development of e-learning, presented many times during the dialogues, was most strongly supported by an UCB representative, stressing the good experiences they had after transforming a significant part of teaching to take place either on-line or in the evenings as Open University teaching modules. E-learning was seen as a future option, but teaching in the evenings and the Open University option did not gain favour, once again due to the teachers' position.

The more specific lines of actions agreed were the following:

- New students will be informed immediately after their admission about the demands of university studies, which challenges them to make choices based on genuine motivation.
- Admitted students will get this information prior to making a decision on acceptance of their programme offer.
- All courses and all assignments must be taken and accomplished with passing grades.
- After communicating the ground rules, the securing of motivation and responsibility belongs to the spheres of academic counselling and study advisors, who will take part

in the Personal Study Plan (PSP) process discussing the individual aims of each student and concrete means to attain them.
- The students will be supported in many ways in their efforts to combine a personalized "puzzle" or "mosaic" consisting of their studies, work and other life, centred very often around a family.

The interpretation given to academic counselling and PSP was that of an agreement between the student and the university community. Following Ansela, Haapaniemi & Voutilainen (2005), PSP was seen to alleviate the anxiety caused by academic freedom, the amount of which may be experienced as excessive, to motivate, to lay down certain obligations and to enhance commitment to studies.

In addition, some fragile ideas of working life connections were presented and supported:

- The recruitment services of universities could take part in PSP updates, with the students' working life orientation and professional interests taken into account in new plans to promote their knowledge and skills.
- With the permission of the students, the study advisors could contact employers, with whom the necessary flexible working hour arrangements could be discussed.
- Employers could be asked to contribute to the practices of the recognition of prior learning, based on their exact knowledge concerning the students.

In addition to the above mentioned notions, no other ideas concerning the employers' future role, or activities to be taken by them to create new practices in reconciling studying and working, were presented. All in all, in the closing discussion it became obvious that there is a long way to go in this matter to reach study-friendly practices at the workplace in addition to agreements covering working hours. The further development of the working life connections were transferred to the "*Networked Skill Creation"*-project.

## Taking action

The teachers and students advisors had to adapt the concrete ideas agreed upon in the workshop with the daily practices of their universities and found potential to realize the ideas. However, six months after the Dialogue Workshop the "*Networked Skill Creation"* project decided to continue along more traditional lines in employer – university collaboration, and organised a panel discussion on the theme of the knowledge and skill challenges of the future working life (ESF Report 2013, 4). The project found it more purposeful to focus on the issues of the relevance of the university education and the steps to build the students' careers (Tomlinson 2007) than to continue the search for study-friendly practices at work. Thus, when reflecting on the activities agreed upon, they are all part of the duties of universities that will transform themselves from "regular daytime organisations" to work-friendly, flexible higher education institutions.

## Follow-up and explanations

As a logical conclusion from the activities agreed upon in Dialogue Workshop in 2012, the role of the employers as such is missing in Figure 3 that lists the actions taken and actors by 2017 to reconcile work and studies at UCA and UCB.

| Activity included in the action plan | Evaluation: What has been done and by whom? |
|---|---|
| Securing the motivation and responsibility of the students themselves | Personal motivation letters and preliminary study plans may be required when applying a position as a master's degree student (the universities require; the students apply) |
| The communication of ground rules | Included in the admission letters (by the universities) |
| Enhancing student counselling; tied to the two above mentioned activities | Teachers are more and more involved in student counselling and in the PSP –processes while the student advisors role is changing towards administrative issues (details of curricula, certificates of degrees); PSP updates more regularly (by universities) |
| The development and applications of e-learning on a regular basis | *"New Solutions to Support E-teaching and E-learning at UCA",* 2016 and 2017 (by universities) |
| Building more contacts between the universities and the employers | *"Regional Learning Platform of Social Sciences"*, 2015-2018 (by universities) |
| More Open University teaching modules and evening classes | Teaching in degree programs and in Open University merged or merging; study credits in Open University a budget indicator since 2012 (by the Ministry of Education and Culture) |
| No permanent jobs to students before the completion of studies; raise in the pay after the Master's degree | New Act on Social Welfare Professionals 817/2015, together with the Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals 272/2005, limit the time allowed to work as an unqualified social worker (substitute) to 12 months, the formal qualification is Master's in Social Work (the Finnish Parliament) |

*Figure 3*: Summary of the practical outcomes and responsible actors.

The student advisors together with teachers have been busy to implement enhanced student counselling and PSPs. New projects have been established to respond to the needs acknowledged, one to support e-learning and one to support university – employer –relationships.

It is noteworthy that the Dialogue Workshop in 2012 did not define any specific means of e-learning, but rather accepted the myth of it as a universal tool to reach flexibility needed by working students. From the teachers' perspective the issue is studied by Kukulska-Hulme (2012) who proposes a lifelong learning perspective which can help the higher education workforce to adapt to the forever changing technology. This view is worth noting since the vision of Keppell (2012) about the next generation learning spaces is about to come true. Keppell (2012) depicts learners traversing physical and virtual spaces using personalised learning strategies involving for example digital citizenship, seamless learning, learner engagement, learning-oriented assessment and lifelong and life-long learning. This might have a bearing also on working students. *"New Solutions to Support E-teaching and E-learning at UCA"*-project seeks to find practical answers to these challenges.

The project enhancing co-operation between the universities and the employers, *"Regional Learning Platform of Social Sciences",* funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), may be seen rather to continue the Dialogue Workshops Conference in 2008 concerned with the employment opportunities of the UCA graduates, or their employability (see Tomlinson 2007), than to create study-friendly workplaces. The main aim of the project is to build new type of connections between universities and working life. It builds partly on the traditional modules of practical training/internships, with the emphasis of learning at work, topics for thesis and continuing education, but it aims higher: The new ideas include, for example, interactive, joint workshops for degree students and graduates in continu-

ing education; both parties learning from each other, creating new learning contents, recognising prior learning, supporting students by mentoring with the help of alumni. It differs from the *Networked Skilled Creation* project in the aspect of students involved: now all students are invited to participate, not only those with prolonged studies and problems of graduation. (Plan/Manuscript of *"Regional Learning Platform of Social Sciences"*).

While in the Dialogue Workshop in 2012 increasing the number of study modules offered by Open University, together with more versatile teaching schedules; was not supported, five years later, this activity has gained a lot of favour. Some of member universities of UCA and UCB have integrated Open University into their regular teaching activities. The rationale behind this is financial: it is cheaper to use the same resources to implement both degree and non-degree programmes. Also, if e-learning is available, it usually increases the credits obtained by all students. This is profitable, since in addition to the number of bachelors and masters' degrees, the Open University study credits as well as the number of students gaining more than 55 study credits in one year are among the new university performance indicators used in the allocation of basic funding (Decree by the Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012). O'Lawrence (2007) argues that reducing the cost of education is an obvious reason to enhance e-learning (as such, without ties to Open University), but is often publicly denied.

The idea presented by the Business Dialogue, that no permanent job should be offered to students before graduation, is strongly alive in the sphere of social work. Within the framework of traditional university models (Sam & van der Sidje 2014) the recent Act on Social Welfare Professionals ( 817/2015) is in line with the Napoleonic, French model, that emphasises high level vocational skills and professional education.

The compilation of actions taken on the basis of the dialogues and plans of the Dialogue Workshop 2012 seems impressive. However, when looking at them closely, we can hardly conclude that the ideal of using local knowledge (Elden 1983) to create local action, would have taken place. Rather, the ideas were carried out due to external forces, although it would be quite challenging to measure exactly the impact of the action plans created, since the recent changes in curricula encourage, or force, more students than usually to get their degree completed. Another notion is that development projects created to meet every day challenges have kept their place.

## Learnings about the AR method applied

The application of Democratic Dialogue in small scale workshops to vision and create concrete practice to reconcile work and studies was a method specific approach (Alasoini 2008). The pragmatic idealism of Democratic Dialogue was transferred to an environment consisting of stakeholders with seemingly shared, but practically diverse goals and to episodic encounters in Dialogue Workshops, not in long lasting development work. Spontaneous feedback was good as detected in the atmosphere of the workshop. Feedback was gathered via an on-line questionnaire, but only five participants responded (ESF 2013, materials). The organisers learned, once again, that getting one's perspective to be heard is not very simple (Kalliola & Nakari 2007), and that people having studies, jobs and families organise the time tightly.

"The discussion dealt mostly with young degree students, who have jobs in order to finance their studies; this happened in the second group. The working method was good and after some problems in the beginning, the discussion was vivid." (Participant 1.)

"A refreshing, "different" afternoon. The event was allowed to last longer than agreed on in the program, which made people to leave before the workshop was over." (Participant 2.)

In the lack of other feedback, the potential of small scale dialogues can be traced by comparing them to the original aims of Democratic Dialogue and the first applications. Traditionally AR, and especially PAR, is associated with the notion of combining research on important societal issues to democracy at the different levels of society, organisations and communities. This was the case, when Democratic Dialogue and Dialogue Conferences (Gustavsen, 1991) gained favour among the labor market partners in Finland (Kalliola & Nakari, 1999). In addition to the conduct of Dialogue Conferences, the workplace democracy aspect could be carried out in the many steering groups and task forces that followed the criteria of Democratic Dialogue (Gustavsen 2001) in their work. As the aim, although not always totally successful, was to tie the PAR projects to the ongoing organisational change, the voice of all stakeholder groups could be integrated into the realisation of sometimes mere survival, sometimes competition, strategies of organisations and into new, concrete steps of action. The not so successful examples come from cases where the dialogue forums have been used to dictate the decisions, or the participants have not taken a full advantage of dialogues forums (Kalliola & Nakari 2007).

Positive or negative, these elements of intensive, long lasting development work with AR are missing, when a series of Dialogue Conferences complemented by other dialogue forums is shrunk to a miniature form and a random selection of participants. The participants may have difficulties in tracing their inputs in the final outcomes. Managers, or other leading actors, may indeed invite diverse stakeholders to workshops to ponder current issues, but without a joint agreement about joint development work there is no obligation to really hear the participants. This would mean that a value based tool of workplace development would turn into a tool of manipulations by offering the mere feeling of participation (Kalliola 1999, 25).

However, the contents of the dialogues in this UCA & UCB case show, how applying the original design of dialogue conferences, (Gustavsen & Englestad 1986), involving "right" participants, brings forward the experiences and future perspectives of various stakeholders, and enables to make feasible action plans. The plans and action taken are very concrete, and "mundane", compared with Shotter's (2004) 'actionable knowledge', but it is not impossible to see how, for example, the understanding and aiming towards 'flexibility' approximates towards Baburoglu and Ravn's (1992) idea of knowledge that becomes a piece of the continuously constructed reality.

On the other hand, timewise small scale dialogue workshops may serve other purposes. The participants, representing various positions, professions and organisations, often learn something worthwhile to apply individually, or to bring forward to their colleagues, absent from the workshop. Eskelinen and Leander (2008) mention idea generation, data gathering and formation of networks as outputs of a small scale dialogue workshop. The opportunity to participate on a democratic forum in the creation of new ideas may also support the agency and the sphere of choices of individuals (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi 2013).

In the background projects of this study, in 2007, the authors were outsiders among the other members of the UC communities besides their own facing some of the problems Smith, Bratini, Chambers, Jensen and Lelaina (2010) mention in building trust and gaining access to the communities to be partners in AR collaboration. Since in university communities the traditional tools of scientific research could not form insurmountable obstacles as in other type of local communities, a collegial bond could be established along the years and along new projects. For the time being the position of the authors approaches that of doing action research in one's own organisation (Coghlans & Brannick 2014) along the building of regional learning structures (Eikeland 2012).

## Discussion

This case narrative continues along the lines described by Moltu (2008) who sees that PAR is usually reported as a romantic story characterised by optimism and light conquering darkness. While continuing the tradition of success stories, we also want to recognise other lines of thought.

Although the central role of Democratic Dialogue in the Finnish Work Conference Method and Dialogue Workshops may seem a rather radical approach, there exist far more radical approaches in the use of participation. For example, compared to the idea of dialogics as a mean of new relationship and cooperation between students, teachers and society (Freire 1972), Democratic Dialogue appears to be just one, quite mechanical tool, in the vast array of organisation development. Also, participatory applications, like small scale Dialogue Workshops, may lead to what Adams, Daudt and Nunes Ramos (2016) call non-liberal view of democracy. However, in the Finnish organisational context, this type of pursuits may be even now be rejected by the management.

Management may not think that while it is almost impossible to give "from above" implementation orders that would not give any leeway, free space for discretion, participatory applications to use this leeway could be productive for all the stakeholders. This would mean a real ownership of the development process at the lowest organisational levels where the new action, ordered by the management, is supposed to take place. Along the emerging entrepreneurial universities (Sam & van der Sidje 2014) also the former collegial leadership is turning towards managerial models, that may, or may not, contain participatory characteristics. Participatory approaches could be useful as our case shows.

Flexible, and at the same time innovative, universities seem to be a core tool in balancing the conflict of studying and working in adult students' lives. It seems that in the future new work friendly practices will form an integral part of the university strategies. Current change drivers, technology and global competition, force them, as other national, regional and local actors to combine their efforts. Assumingly various actors will continue to deploy development projects, and there will come new opportunities to exercise learnings from participatory approaches.

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# Field-configuring events and action research: A case study from Sparta

*Helge Svare, Eugenia Vathakou*

**Abstract**
FCE theory was developed within neo-institutional theory, the aim of which is to understand how institutions and organisations function and change. In this paper, we match this theory with another theoretical tradition: that of action research. We use this theoretical framework to analyse and reflect upon the SpARTathlo event in the Greek town of Sparta. We demonstrate how the framework enables both a more multifaceted and more comprehensive understanding of the event, and how this has practical implications for the improvement of such events.

**Key words**: field-configuring events, action research, innovation, regional development.

**Eventos de configuración de campo e investigación-acción: Un estudio de caso de Esparta**

**Resumen**
La teoría de eventos de configuración de campo (FCE, por sus siglas en inglés) fue desarrollada dentro de la teoría neo-institucional, cuyo objetivo es comprender cómo funcionan y cambian las instituciones y las organizaciones. En este artículo, comparamos esta teoría con otra tradición teórica: la de la investigación-acción. Utilizamos este marco teórico para analizar y reflexionar sobre el evento SpARTathlo en la ciudad griega de Esparta. Demostramos cómo el marco permite una comprensión más multifacética y más amplia del evento, y cómo esto tiene implicaciones prácticas para la mejora de tales eventos.

**Palabras clave**: Eventos de configuración de campo, investigación-acción, innovación, desarrollo regional

## 1. Introduction

During the last 10-15 years there has been a growing interest in the concept and theory of Field-Configuring Events (FCEs). FCEs are settings in which people from diverse organisations and with diverse purposes assemble either periodically or on a one-time basis, under some common agenda (Lampel and Meyer, 2008). According to FCE theory, such events have significant effects on the field in which they function as *temporary focus points*. During a FCE, relationships emerge, discussions are initiated, information is shared, project

ideas are proposed, etc, all of which continue to have effects even after the event, as participants follow up the various initiatives that were initiated during the event, or act upon the information that they got access to. In this sense, the FCE *configures* its corresponding field, i.e., gives it structure and form. Or, as a field is never static, but should rather be conceived as a complex and dynamic web of trajectories, we may say that the FCE gives structure and form to such dynamics, functioning as a temporary, dynamic hub to a multitude of emerging developmental trajectories. To introduce a simile, we could compare the FCE to a stone dropped in water, creating motion where it hits the water, but also concentric circles moving outwards in an increasing distance.

FCE theory was developed within the neo-institutional theory, the aim of which is to understand how institutions and organizations function and change. In this paper, we match this theory to another theoretical tradition: that of action research. The idea of a connection between the two traditions is based on the insight that they both address the phenomenon of *change* in social fields, albeit in a complementary way.

Action research is typically motivated by an endeavour to initiate change or to organise a change process, preferably in order to improve conditions for a group, an organisation or a community (Eikeland & Finsrud, 1995; McNiff, 2013). When action researchers and stakeholders join forces to initiate an action research project, thus, producing the *contexualised knowledge* that is typical of action research, this knowledge is not sought for merely, or even primarily, theoretical reasons; it is from the start dedicated to serve as the basis for the change process that the project aims to accomplish. As has already been stated, FCE theory aims to understand how institutions and organisations function and change. Both FCE theory and action research, thus, are oriented at change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

Another commonality is the emphasis on events. In FCE theory this is the very centre of the theory. However, events also have a significant function in action research, for instance, in the form of dialogue conferences that are organised to collect and reflect on knowledge, make decisions, and design plans for common action (Ekman Philips & Huzzard, 2007; Gustavsen & Engelstad, 1986). Our idea, thus, was that by matching FCE theory and action research, one could use FCE theory to achieve better and more insightful descriptions and analyses of how such conferences, and other events, function within action research, which in the next round could lay the ground for designing even more successful events. A central aspect of FCE theory, is that it is not insignificant how an event is organised. If, from the start, one takes into account that the purpose of the event is to promote an optimal, productive effect, not only *during* the event, but also *after* the event, in the field that the event configures, then one may design the event with this in mind, and thus be able to design more productive events.

In the present paper we will explore the productivity of this perspective by applying it on an event organised as part of an action research project located at the Greek town of Sparta. The aim of the participatory action research (PAR) project was to empower and mobilise local unemployed and underemployed citizens and related local actors, by jointly addressing un/under-employment as a collective problem. It sought to tackle the problem of un/under-employment through a bottom-up action for sustainable economic recovery and local development. As part of this project, an event was organised under the heading of "SpARTathlo – Routes of Taste, Trade and Art" (from now on SpARTathlo). SpARTathlo

was designed as an extension of or an addition to another event, that for many years has been taking place annually in Sparta: the ultra-distance foot race of Spartathlon that draws numerous visitors to the city. The idea behind SpARTathlo, was to create a new event, parallel to this sporting event, in order to strengthen the local economy.

The paper focuses on the following research questions.

- Is it possible to describe and analyse events organised as part of an action research product, like the SpARTathlo in Sparta, as an FCE?
- What insights does such an analysis produce, that may be useful?
- How can such insights help improve the design of future events of this sort within action research?

## 2. Theory

According to Lampel and Meyer FCEs are:

> Settings in which people from diverse organisations and with diverse purposes assemble periodically, or on a one-time basis, to announce new products, develop industry standards, construct social networks, recognise accomplishments, share and interpret information, and transact business. FCEs are arenas in which networks are constructed, business cards are exchanged, reputations are advanced, deals are struck, news is shared, accomplishments are recognised, standards are set, and dominant designs are selected. FCEs can enhance, reorient, or even undermine existing technologies, industries, or markets; alternately, they can become crucibles from which new technologies, industries, and markets emerge. (Lampel and Meyer, 2008, p. 1026).

FCEs have six defining characteristics, which constitute an operational definition:

1. FCEs assemble in one location actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds.
2. FCEs' duration is limited, normally running from a few hours to a few days.
3. FCEs provide unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interaction.
4. FCEs include ceremonial and dramaturgical activities.
5. FCEs are occasions for information exchange and collective sense-making.
6. FCEs generate social and reputational resources that can be deployed elsewhere and for other purposes.

What sort of fields does an FCE address? As can be noted by the above definitional remarks, FCE theory seems to have more to say on the FCEs configuring a field, than the field being configured. In the FCE literature, we find numerous examples of what various authors have conceived as fields, such as the transnational climate policy field (Schüßler et al., 2013), the emerging field of HIV/AIDS treatment advocacy in Canada (Maguire et al., 2004), or the commercial music field associated with the annual Grammy ceremony of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) (Anand and Watson, 2004). Still there seems to be a lack of a more general discussion of what defining marks "something" needs to have in order to count as a field, or how it is useful to employ the concept in the first place. To find a more general discussion of the field concept as such, thus, we need to go back to the neo institutional literature, or even the broader sociological literature, from which the field concept of the FCE literature emerged.

According to Martin (2003) the word "field" in sociology is used in three overlapping or interrelated senses. In the first, there is the purely topological sense emphasised by Lewin: the field is conceived as an analytic area of simplified dimensions in which we position persons or institutions. Second, there is the sense of a field as an organisation of forces. Third, there is the sense of the field as a field of contestation, a battlefield (Martin, 2003).

If we narrow the focus down to the neo institutional concept of organisational field (OF), several approaches have been suggested, as to how this concept may be defined. In a seminal paper from 1983, DiMaggio and Powell define the concept as follows:

> By organisational field, we mean those organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products. The virtue of this unit of analysis is that it directs our attention not simply to competing firms […], or to networks of organisations that actually interact […] but to the totality of relevant actors. (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983)

The connection between the members of an OF, according to DiMaggio and Powell, may include, but are not restricted to, 'actual interaction'. OF may also be more or less formalised. Moreover, they may have the form of contractual relationships, they may be embedded within existing organizations like professional associations or labour unions, or they may be emerging, still lacking clear structure or boundaries (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Finally, the OF needs to be recognised as an area of institutional life. The presence of actual connections is in itself not enough. They need to be perceived as constituting some kind of a whole.

Two potential challenges arise from this account of an OF: One arises from the seemingly prolific list of connection types that, according to the theory, may constitute a field. A second challenge arises when we look at the final definitional criterion above: How, for instance, do we decide what constitutes a recognized area of institutional life? What does the term 'regognised' mean, and who is to judge whether the criterion is satisfied?

Finally, we are faced with the challenge that most of the definitional criteria for an OF seem to have the form of gradual scales. According to DiMaggio and Powell, the 'structuration' of an OF consists, e.g., of 'an increase in the extent of interaction among organisations in the field', and 'the development of a mutual awareness among participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Here, the question arises: Is there a threshold level for when the level of interaction and mutual awareness is high enough to constitute a field, or is any level sufficient?

Instead of seeing this openness as a weakness, we side with those who see it as the strength of the OF concept.

First, it secures a unique generality to the concept, which makes it applicable in a wide range of social systems. This also gives the OF concept a unique heuristic value: It allows researchers to approach any landscape of actors standing in some relation to each other, and start exploring the structure without any preconceived idea regarding what this structure should be or how the actors should be connected. As a heuristic tool, it opens up for looking into emerging or established networks or agglomerations with a fresh eye without any preconceived notions limiting the investigations. This might be especially valuable for emerging agglomerations. At the same time, an OF cannot be *anything*. Where there is no interaction or mutual awareness, there is no OF. In the OF literature, several versions of this position are represented. For instance, the OF-concept is frequently used as a tool for analysing

emergent fields, or it is used to explore fields (both emergent and more established) with an unusual composition of actors. For instance, Powell et al. (2005) prefer to conceptualise 'biotechnology' as a field, rather than an industry or population, as it is, according to these authors, not a separate industrial sector with well-defined boundaries, but rather a collection of widely heterogeneous members. They conclude: 'Field captures the diversity of organisations more aptly than any other term' (Walter W. Powell et al., 2005). A similar point is made by Scott et al. (2000) who see the heuristic value of the OF-concept in its multidimensionality, incorporating in the field both organisation sets and organisation populations, in addition to critical 'vertical' relations, such as the relationship between headquarters and local establishments, or professional and governmental actors that establish the rules and norms governing practice [within the field] (Scott et al., 2000).

Davis and Marquis (2005) promote an interpretation of the OF-concept, focusing not so much on the organisations that may be seen as constituting a field, as on the individual members of these organisations, and therein they also see the value of the concept. They characterize modern organisations as 'dense spots in networks of contracts between sovereign individuals' (Davis and Marquis, 2005). Rather than studying these 'spots', they recommend 'taking the field as the relevant unit of analysis and remaining agnostic about whether it is composed of organisations, individuals, or other combinations of actors' (Davis and Marquis, 2005). They conclude with a hope that a general 'theory of fields' will eventually fill the space held by organisation theory (Davis and Marquis, 2005).

McAdam and Scott (2005) see the heuristic value of the OF-concept not only in that it opens up for an exploration of heterogeneous but related actors, but also for exploring them in their context. More than traditional network-research that studies contact points and frequency of contacts at network nodes (see e.g. Granovetter, 1983), field theory allows the researcher to also explore, for instance, the culture and norms of the field in which these nodes are embedded (see e.g. DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), or the institutional logic characterizing the field, i.e., the belief system and associated practices that predominate (Scott et al., 2000).

A central question in OF-theory, is how the field came into existence in the first place, and what may count as its structuring mechanisms. Again, several answers are suggested; from rules and norms set by states and professional systems (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), through collaborations (Phillips et al., 2000), through institutional entrepreneurs (Maguire et al., 2004), to conflicts and debates (Wooten and Hoffman, 2008, cf. also Schüßler et al., 2013). According to Martin (2003) fields arise whenever a set of individuals is striving after a similar goal. Gibbons (2004) sees OFs as including organisations that produce related outputs, use related resources, and rely on similar technologies (Gibbons, 2004). Scott (1994) states that the notion of field connotes the existence of a community of organisations that partake of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and forcefully with one another than with actors outside the field.

In a summary of the literature, Lampel and Meyer (2008) suggest that fields begin as agglomerations of individuals, groups, and organisations that meet sporadically at first, and then with increasing frequency. These contacts foster competitive and collaborative interactions, which, depending on the circumstances, can trigger field evolution. At the structural level, the field may then begin to acquire macro structural features that will reinforce field permanence. At the cognitive level, field members gain awareness of the field in its totality,

and acquire identity as field members. The two levels, the structural and cognitive, reinforce each other (cf. also Walter W. Powell et al., 2005 and, Meyer et al., 2005).

While early OF-theory had a main focus on mechanisms of isomorphism that make the members of a field more similar (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), later OF-theory has become more interested in how such fields change over time, thereby emphasizing their dynamics and character. In explaining field evolution, the concept of field configuring events (FCEs) has come to occupy a central position. According to Lampel and Meyer (2005), FCEs are 'temporary social organisations, such as tradeshows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries' (cf. also Lampel and Meyer, 2008). FCEs are often initiated or organized by institutional entrepreneurs with an overt field-building agenda (Lampel and Meyer, 2008, Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006).

The FCE-concept brings at least two significant gains to the OF-literature. Firstly, it draws new light on the boundary problem associated with the OF-concept, by stating that the relation between FCE and field is recursive: FCEs are not only mechanisms of field configuration but also products of a field, shaped by field developments in a recursive process (Schüßler et al., 2013, Lampel and Meyer, 2008). FCEs, thus, are both the products and the drivers of field evolution: Under certain conditions the field gives rise to FCEs, but once they come into being, FCEs generate their own evolutionary pressures that further shape the field's cognitive, normative, and/or social structures (Lampel and Meyer, 2008). This is also relevant for understanding who is recognised as belonging to the field, or not: One has to study the events; who is allowed to attend the FCEs, in which roles, and with what power to influence the processes involved.

The second gain of the FCE-concept is that it offers the researcher a way to understand the evolution of a field by exploring in detail the features of the FCE that 'configures' it, e.g., everything from its management or facilitation, rituals, and other major design dimensions, to the myriad of micro-meetings and micro-processes that take place in a FCE. Here, FCE theory also connects to another research tradition exploring the interface between the social/pragmatic and physical/aesthetical, see for instance Antal and Friedman (2017). The idea of recursivity between field and FCE also reminds us that we need to see the field not so much as a fixed structure, but as a continuous process, or a dialectical dynamism between OF, FCE, OF, and so on.

At the centre of our argument, thus, lies the idea that a field emerges when agents, who initially were only loosely connected, or not connected at all, gradually develop the awareness of being relevant to each other in a new way (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This does not mean, necessarily, that they have a common goal, or engage in a common project, as in a traditional collaboration, even if this may also be the case. However, the field emerges when people within it start to think of their own goals and projects as partially overlapping with those of the others within the emerging field. And, it emerges when they develop an interest in what the others do, *because* their plans and action have a potential effect on their own life and activities.

## Sparta as a field and SpARTathlo as a FCE

It is time to return to the case of Sparta and the SpARTathlo intervention. We will first describe the local context and the general PAR project within which the event was organised.

We then will proceed by discussing how using FCE theory to analyse and reflect on the case may produce new, productive insights.

### The local context

When the project was initiated, Sparta and the surrounding region was already heavily affected by the global financial crisis, with employment deterioration and shrinking job opportunities. The total workforce in the Peloponnese region, where Sparta is situated, is 260.000 and the general employment rate is 62%. The employment rate for people between 55-64 years is 44,2% (Eurostat, 2015). The economic mix of the region includes mostly agriculture and tourism but small scale industrial activity has grown over the last years. Peloponnese's contribution to the national agricultural production is, however, significant. Main agricultural products are fruits (53% of national production), olive oil (65% of national production) and potatoes (11% of national production). The Peloponnese is also famous for its wine producing areas, such as Nemea and Mandinea.

Sparta is one of the main cities of the Peloponnese and the capital of the prefecture of Laconia. The town of Sparta has 35.259 inhabitants, and Laconia 89.600 inhabitants (census 2011). According to the 2011 census, the majority of the population in Laconia is engaged in the tertiary sector, the primary production sector follows, and last comes the secondary sector. Tourism is a significant source of income, as the modern town is built on the location of the ancient Sparta, which was a prominent city-state in ancient Greece. Sparta also lies close to other famous archeological sites, like Mystras, a World Heritage Site.

The analysis of the predominant production structure in Laconia and salaried employment for 2013-2015, demonstrates that entrepreneurship in Laconia has increased moderately behind the national average by 10.32% (ERGANI Information System, Hellenic Ministry of Labour and Social Security). On a national scale, entrepreneurship increased by 13.3% from 2013 to 2015. Nevertheless, although the number of salaried employees increased by 23,57%, ERGANI data show that hirings counteract lay-offs. Another element, important to understand the consequences of the crisis on the labour market landscape in Laconia, is that employers seem to prefer part-time and rotation workers over full time employees: the share of the latter in total hiring decreased from 64.4% in 2013 to 45.5% in 2016 (Tsampra, Gerats & Bimpas 2016).

### The PAR project

The PAR project within which the SpARTathlo event was organised, was established in the framework of a research project which included three main work packages. The two first work packages aimed at investigating the problem of un/underemployment at the national, regional and local level, while the third work package involved a PAR component with the establishment of a PAR group in Sparta.

The aim of the PAR group was to empower the un/underemployed along with other relevant social actors/stakeholders in Sparta, and to transform and reconstruct views and

practices relevant to the problem of underutilisation of human resources associated with un/underemployment. The next step was to discuss and design collaborative actions addressing this problem. Last, but not least, a longer-term objective was to initiate a process that could serve as the basis for policy reforms and socio-economic development at a broader level.

## Identification of local stakeholders to be involved in the PAR group

The identification of participants is among the first critical steps of the PAR process (McNiff 2013). As the project started, there was a previous relationship of trust and good cooperation between the main researcher in the project, and key local stakeholders, based on an earlier project. This was helpful for the task of the identification of the appropriate participants. By means of these pre-existing contacts, a first list of suggested members to the PAR group was set up. The selection was based on a search for participants that would be able to contribute to a meaningful discussion about the problem of un/underemployment at the local level, and with resources to generate and implement a collaborative action plan that could address the problem. More specifically, the main criteria employed for the identification and selection of suitable participants in the PAR group were:

- Their position in organizations/agencies relevant to the project and their capacity within these organisations to initiate change. This was not necessarily the directors of the organisations. What mattered was their degree of influence, formal or informal, within the organisation.
- Their willingness to contribute to the process and undertake the role of a co-researcher.
- For the un/underemployed participants of the group in particular, the main criterion was their willingness to actively contribute to the process. It should be added that although it was not considered as a criterion from the beginning, a gender perspective was included, as the two un/underemployed participants were also young women (under 40 years old) highly educated (master degree holders) with some working experience.

This initial stage of the project involved extensive dialogue between the researcher and the potential participants that had been identified, also drawing attention to the upcoming PAR process. Additionally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with potential participants, in order to collect relevant information that would be useful in the design of the following process.

The members of the initial PAR group were as follows:

- Two representatives of the Sparta municipality (both were members of the municipal council, one of them was the mayor's adviser for agricultural development, the other was the president of the municipal committees for primary and secondary education with extensive experience in local development project planning.
- The president of the Federation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants of Laconia (OEBEL)
- The president of the Chamber of Laconia,
- A representative of Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED)
- Representatives of the NGO Activate Now

- The CEO of a local company for community waste management with approximately 1.000 citizens shareholders (as this participation could also open a discussion about cyclical economy and the use of local resources for sustainable development)
- A representative of the local Directorate of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage
- Two young women, one expert in digital marketing and unemployed and another one with a degree in economics and underemployed.

Special reference should be made to *Activate Now,* a local NGO established by 9 young (under 35 years old) well educated (MAs and PhD) professionals from different fields (architecture, civil engineering, education, public lighting, digital marketing, etc.) Eight of the nine members of the organisation are women. The aim of the organisation is to contribute to local development through collaborative planning. The idea of SpARTathlo was proposed by Activate Now, which also led its implementation.

During the first meeting of the PAR group, participants were invited to reflect on the composition of the group, and to discuss whether there were other significant partners who should be invited into the process. The researcher contacted those suggested, and invited them to the next meetings.

In the second meeting, the group was thus enlarged with a farmer and president of a local co-operative of farmers, and the president of the local Workers Centre. The president of Laconia's Union of Hotels was invited to participate, but, although he expressed his interest, practical problems made it difficult for him to attend the meetings. However, the researcher had several discussions with him, and he was added to the mailing list of the PAR group. This proved to be a good strategy, as later he engaged himself in recruiting local hotels to the SpARTathlo event.

## How the PAR group decided to organize the SpARTathlo event

Once the group was established, regular weekly meetings were convened, every time with a clear agenda. The first two meetings provided a space for participants to get to know each other better. Participants were also invited to prepare a brief presentation (no more than two pages) about their respective organisations, including three main sections:

1) Basic information about their organisation.
2) Actual and/or potential work of each organisation to generate new jobs. For the un/underemployed: how, in the past, they had sought suitable jobs.
3) Requests or ideas directed at the other members of the group, related to how *they* could collaborate in order to address un/underemployment better through concrete action.

Thus, the group discussed openly and self-critically actions/interventions already undertaken by their organisations, analysing their effectiveness or/and failures. As for the requests, only four out of the eleven members of the group were able to put forward specific requests.

In the third meeting, the group was also provided with systematic information about un/underemployment in the region, including the results of the first two work packages of the project. In the two following meetings, the members of the group then put forward ideas for collaborative projects and/or actions with the potential for stimulating local development, and for addressing the problem of un/underemployment.

Thus surfaced the idea to organise the SpARTathlo event. The background is as follows: Since 1984, a historic foot race has been organised, from Athens to Sparta (246km), following in the footsteps of the ancient messenger Fidipides, who ran to Sparta to announce the victory of the Athenians against the Persians in the Marathon battle in 490 B.C. John Foden, a British RAF Wing Commander and his colleagues revived the *Spartathlon race* in 1984, and since then it has taken place every year in late September. This so-called *ultramarathon* is organised by the International Spartathlon Association (I.S.A), a company established for this purpose. However, I.S.A is not located in Sparta, and neither the town of Sparta, nor its institutions and citizens, are formally involved in the event. Even the official awards ceremony takes place in Athens, not in Sparta. The only activity that has been organised by the municipality of Sparta during the event, is an evening of music and folk dance in the town's central square, after most of the athletes have ended the race.

The idea behind the SpARTathlo event was to use the existing sports event as an opportunity for organising also other activities in the city. The sports event was perceived by the PAR group as a territorial resource representing a competitive advantage for the town, with the potential to strengthen local economy and attract more tourists, if only the city could act on the opportunities that the ultramarathon offered.

More specifically, the objectives of SpARTathlo were defined as follows: Firstly, for the town, with its institutions and local market, to acquire ownership of an event closely connected to its historic past, and to capitalise on it. Secondly, to advertise and promote the city, with a special emphasis on the shops outside of the most central area of the city centre, and the less well known local products. Thirdly, to revive the local market in general, and increase the economic profit for the local shops and other commercial actors locally, during the three days of the Spartathlo sports event, by attracting more customers from the approximately 2.500 athletes and their companions visiting the city, as well as the local community.

## Briefly on how SpARTathlo was organised, and how the event unfolded

The SpARTathlo event involved the establishment of a network of different locations around the town, including restaurants, shops, architect offices, art galleries and crafts shops, forming three routes: the routes of Taste, Trade and Art. An open invitation was distributed to potential participants, and 56 restaurants, shops, etc., responded positively. In the rest of this paper we will call them, for short, *the network*.

The members of this network were invited to develop "something special" related to the Spartathlon marathon. In response, several restaurants and cafes prepared special dishes and drinks named after the history of ancient Sparta, and/or they prepared food and drinks of special nutritional value for the athletes. Architects' offices prepared maps of the ancient town of Sparta, and displayed photos from archeological sites.

The three routes of Taste, Trade and Art were also visually represented by a special map, both available on paper and digitally. Special signs at the entrances of the shops, galleries, etc. with the logo of the action, and corresponding to the map's signs, were set up, and so was an art installation in the town center. Printed maps were distributed to the athletes and their companions before they came to Sparta, and maps were also available at selected spots during the event.

Additionally, a promotional marketing campaign was organised though social media and mass media. All of the 56 network locations were photographed, and short texts about their event-specific products/services were published. The facebook pages of the network members, and the blog of Activate Now were also used as information channels.

## Outcomes

In what follows we present some of the outcomes of the event, based on the evaluation conducted after the event. More specifically, the main researcher in collaboration with the project implementation team from Activate Now designed a participatory evaluation process, involving the members of the network. A questionnaire was developed for this purpose and filled in through an extensive interview with them. The results were collected and analysed and a full evaluation report was drawn, according to the DAC evaluation criteria for projects, namely Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability (OECD, 1991). The report produced was discussed in two meetings: one with the members of the PAR group and another one with the members of the network and the members of the PAR group.

Overall, the action was found to have met its main objective which was to open innovative paths of social and economic development in the town based on its resources (territorial resources and highly skilled human resources) through the collaboration of local stakeholders.

The first intended result of the SpARTathlo intervention was the activation of the local community: this was achieved not only by the significant number of shop owners/craftsmen/artists who actively participated in the event, but also by the number of network members who created a new product or a new promotional action in the framework of SpARTathlo. 23 of the 43 members who took part in the evaluation, claimed they created new products.

Just as important, however, was the experience of participating in a joint, collective, action. When the members of the network were asked during the evaluation "did you feel that you participated in a collective action planning process for local development", 67% answered that they felt they were involved "very much," 12% stated "enough", 7% answered "moderate", 5% answered "a little" and 9% answered "no". Following up on the negative responses demonstrated that the question surprised many participants, as they had not really reflected upon this dimension of the action. After explanations were provided, however, they changed their initial negative reaction and answered "very much" and "enough".

The next expected result was the successful advertisement and promotion of the 56 members of the network, with an emphasis on the shops outside the most central area of the city centre, and the less well known local products. The event *to some extent* achieved this result. More specifically, to the relevant question the majority (58%) answered "very much" and "sufficiently". In follow-up interviews most of the informants stated that there had been an increase of mobility on their facebook pages some days before and during the SpARTathlo, and they also received an increased number of "friend requests" with different than usual characteristics. A satisfied member of the network said she received "many likes and friend requests not only from regular citizens but also from colleagues and other professionals" and she was sure that "the event will yield more benefits in the near future." Other professionals reported that a number of clients and acquaintances had informed them

that they had noticed relevant advertisements during the event, and thus gained new insight into their products and services. They also expressed admiration for inventiveness and creativity mobilised for the event.

On the other hand, 16% of those participating in the evaluation answered that they did not gain any benefits in terms of promotion of their shop/work. Taking a closer look at their cases, we found that they were somewhat different from the others. Three of them are not familiar with social media. Two of them were not satisfied with their photos and presentations, and another two mentioned errors in the map concerning their presentations.

Regarding growth in the customers base, the evaluation indicates that the goal was only moderately reached. Only 15% of the respondents stated that they observed a big/sufficient increase in the number of foreign customers in their shops, and about 18% reported an increase in local customers. A few members of the network said that several foreign customers appeared in their shops with the SpARTathlo maps in their hands. On the other hand, 75% of the professionals participating in the evaluation answered that there was no increase in foreign customers at all during the SpARTathlo event, and 50% said that they have not benefited at all in terms of local customers. Regarding the increase in local customers, a small percentage (about 7%) replied "do not know" because, as they explained, there was definitely an increase, but many factors may have contributed to this, not only the SpARTathlo event.

The evaluation of this specific aspect of the event should take into account that the increase in customers is perhaps best conceived as a longer-term goal that cannot be fully achieved through a three-day event. The evaluation suggests that SpARTathlo contributed *towards* this direction. Many network members expected that the promotion/advertising done through the event would continue to produce results for them also after the event, as a result of their enhanced visibility during the event. Equally important, the evaluation highlights the ways in which this longer-term objective can be achieved: One weakness found in the planning of the event is that the athletes are too tired to go around and explore the town directly after the marathon. Furthermore, the programme of the athletes and accompanying persons limits the free time spent in the town, at least this is how it has been until now, as most head quickly back to Athens for the final ceremony. Thus, a discussion was called for as to whether the athletes and their companions should be defined as the main target group of later events, if other groups should be targeted and advertisement should be adjusted accordingly, or whether the event itself should be designed in another way.

One of the ideas that emerged in this respect, involved the idea of Sparta becoming a sports tourist resort. Some members of the network, during the evaluation process, suggested concrete ideas about how this could be achieved. For example, two members suggested the organisation of a «half marathon road running event» (21km) organized by local stakeholders a couple of days before or after the ultramarathon itself. This race would then attract athletes and their companions from Greece and beyond.

Last but not least, for some stakeholders and people involved in this action, SpARTathlo highlighted the need of the town of Sparta for a coherent local development strategy including a well designed town branding process which could accommodate this kind of interventions. For others, it demonstrated the opposite: instead of such a "top down" process, one should rather go for more "bottom up" initiatives like SpARTathlo, with the potential to gradually lead to more collaborative social and economic change.

## SpARTathlo as FCE

The point in introducing new concepts as analytic tools, is that they allow us to notice something in the object of study, that we perhaps would not have recognised without it. So, what does the concept of FCE contribute in analysing the SpARTathlo? We will use the six-point list of Lampel and Meyer as a starting point:

1. *FCEs assemble in one location actors from diverse professional, organizational, and geographical backgrounds.*

In our case, the SpARTathlo intervention assembled actors from diverse professional, organisational and geographical backgrounds. As mentioned above, there were 56 network members, along with the PAR group involved in the implementation of the event. The network members were mostly owners of restaurants, cafés and shops, art spaces and architect offices from Sparta. The network also included the owner of an organic farm and the president of a cooperative of farmers in a nearby village.

Last, but not the least, come the visitors and customers and others who used the maps or information produced specifically to the event, to discover the city of Sparta in a new way, facilitated by the event. We might even add the rest of the city, at least those who were somehow involved in the activities, as observers, dialogue partners or participants.

2. *FCEs' duration is limited, normally running from a few hours to a few days.*

SpARTathlo was a temporary social organisation, it lasted three days, from Friday the 30th of September to Sunday the 2nd of October 2016, that is, from the day the group of athletes started the race in Athens to the day they left the town of Sparta to return to Athens.

3. *FCEs provide unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interaction.*

SpARTathlo met this condition, as it generated a unique opportunity for increased streams of communication and enhanced collaboration among those involved. For the network members and PAR members, a significant part of this interaction took place during the preparatory phase. Strictly spoken, this was not part of the event itself, however, as we will discuss below, it was intimately connected to it. The PAR group had three meetings focused on the discussion and preparation of the event. Additionally, they met with the project team, members of the Activate Now group and the members of the network in their shops, where they first informed them about the plan and started a collaboration in order to prepare the promotion material for each shop (slogan, brief description text, photos etc.) Additionally, separate meetings were organised with representatives of specific organizations of the PAR group according to their role. Furthermore, several independent experts were gathered around the main project team responding to the needs for specific expertise, namely an image consultant, a web designer, an expert in digital marketing and a group of photographers.

In addition came the interaction during the event itself, especially between the network members and the customers/visitors. As the aim of the event was, among other things, to increase the customer base of the network members, these interactions were obviously highly significant, as they defined the probability both for commercial transactions during the event, as well as in the future, and also as an incentive for visitors and customers to recommend certain locations to others.

4. *FCEs include ceremonial and dramaturgical activities.*

The FCE literature does not define precisely what may count as ceremonial and dramaturgical activities; however, under this heading we will, for this event, include the special menus, restructured windows, art installation, street events, etc., that were orchestrated to paint a creative, dynamic and attractive picture of the town. In addition, the map that was designed, and the corresponding signs distributed across town to tie the organized walks together may be seen as part of the dramaturgy of the event.

5. *FCEs are occasions for information exchange and collective sense-making.*

Due to the event, for the first time in the history of the Spartathlon race, this sports event was perceived by local institutions and an expanded group of people, as an opportunity for the promotion and branding of the town. But SpARTathlo went well beyond that, as an occasion for collective sense-making, as it provided the incentive to, and created the space for, a dialogue about how the town could acquire ownership over its past and present. It set the ground for an active exchange of ideas, where values and beliefs were also discussed. Articles in the local mass media and social media reflected this development, thereby further enhancing the sense-making process to the readers and the wider public. Questions like the following were posed: What are the key features of the town's identity? What are the concrete actions to be undertaken for this identity to be developed and the vision to be realised? What values should guide the town's branding process?

Participating in the sense-making of the event were also the visitors and customers, we may assume, for instance by giving feedback to the network members, both verbally, and in non-verbal, behavioral ways, during their visits with the network members.

6. *FCEs generate social and reputational resources that can be deployed elsewhere and for other purposes.*

One of the organisations that gained the most from SpARTathlo, at the area of social and reputational resources, was the organisation *Activate Now*, which had a central role in the facilitation of the whole project. First, this project was clearly at a higher scale than other actions the organisation had undertaken earlier. It involved greater complexity, public exposure and risk taking. Despite this difficulty, the work conducted was professional and the overall outcome quite positive. It provided the young professionals of *Activate Now* the opportunity to demonstrate their capacities and acquire the self-confidence necessary to keep on working on similar local development projects. The SpARTathlo action provided an excellent opportunity for the emergence of productive partnerships between the team of *Activate Now* and the PAR group as well as a group of (mostly) young (and mostly underemployed) professionals in the broader region (photographers, digital marketing experts, image consultant expert). To conclude, this collaborative action also addressed, in a sustainable manner, the problem of un/underemployment, at least for the specific group of young professionals involved, in the planning and implementation of the action and created new prospects for local economic development which would create new employment opportunities in the town.

Concerning the 56 members of the network, as noted above, many professionals stated that they were strengthened by the SpARTathlo action in different ways. Some of them improved their marketing strategy, as they understood the significance of catchy slogans and the power of photography and social media. Several members of the network indicated that

the action mobilized and inspired them with new ideas not only for the three days of SpARTathlo, but for the future as well (e.g. for new products, better promotion, partnerships).

The SpARTathlo action will ultimately be assessed by what will follow. It is important that such an investment (in time-expertise-money) be a stepping stone for other actions organized in a professional and consistent manner and not merely a flash in the pan. When members of the network were asked, whether the intervention should be repeated next year, 98% replied "Yes" and 2% answered "yes, but not exactly the way it was implemented", highlighting the need for an approach that takes also into account the particularities of certain areas (e.g. shops far from the town centre require a different approach which will address their needs). Moreover, 85% suggested that similar events should be organized throughout the year. Finally, during the evaluation session of the PAR group after the event, all participants were positive about the repetition of the action next year.

## What is the field in this case, and how was it configured

In the previous section, we have argued that the SpARTathlo meets the criteria of the FCE definition offered by Lampel and Mayer. In this section, we will discuss more specifically how we may best delineate *the field* of the present case. Is it the town of Sparta, with its immediate surroundings? Is it primarily the PAR group and network members? How do the visitors and customers, both from the local community, and from further afar, fit into the picture?

Based on what we have discussed in the theory chapter, and based on the open, we could say agnostic, quality of the field concept, we will argue that the field in this case includes all the above-mentioned groups to a lesser or larger degree. On a general level, this claim is supported by McAdam and Scott's ( 2005) idea of the heuristic value of the OF-concept to explore heterogeneous but related actors in their context (see also DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Relevant to our argument is also the idea of a recursive relation between a FCE and its field, i.e., that FCEs do not simply emerge from existing fields, they just as much produce and define fields (Schüßler et al. 2013, Lampel and Meyer 2008). They do so, for instance, by establishing mechanisms for who is to be invited to the FCEs and in what roles.

First and foremost, however, the field emerges when people within it start to think of their own goals and projects as partially overlapping or complementary with those of the others within the emerging field, and when they develop an interest in what the others do, *because* their plans and actions have a potential effect on their own life and activities.

The FCE, then, is the place where all this becomes visible, and also, where this dynamics is further enhanced. During the FCE, the initially complex mix of overlapping interests and awarenesses may then gradually develop into a feeling of a "we", in the sense that the participants develop new insights on how they are connected.

So much said, the participants are *also* present at the event, as well as in the corresponding field, in distinct and different roles that imply different types of attachment and influence. Sometimes, these roles may also involve latent or actual competition or conflict of interest. What may appear to be a successful outcome for one, thus, does not need to be so for another. For instance, in a FCE serving as the meeting point of an industry, some of the participating businesses may be competitors. Still, however, they may refer to each other as a "we", implying that, in spite of this competition, they see themselves as part of a community of some sort, or *a field*, to use the terminology that we presently employ.

Returning to the SpARTathlo case, to identify its field, two significant groups should be distinguished initially: First the organisers, involving the NGO Activate Now and the PAR group as well as the broader network of shops and restaurants. Secondly, and just as important, the visitors and customers. Without the latter group, the event would have been unimaginable. At some level, the success of the event may also be measured by their involvement in it. And as a main underlying aim of the event was to stimulate local innovation and economic growth, the significance of the customer group (and other visitors as potential customers) cannot be underrated, as innovation theory emphasises how innovation and economic growth is stimulated by customer involvement (Grabher, Ibert, & Flohr, 2008; Stamm, 2004; Svare, 2016).

By looking at the SpARTathlo case through the FCE theory-lens, however, we also realise that visitors and customers, by being involved in the event, have also the potential to become part of the "we" that see themselves connected to the others involved, and, thus, as part of the field. From other festivals, we know that festival audiences often develop an interest in the place of the festival, not only to the extent that they become recurrent visitors, but also in the sense that they seek information on what happens at the specific place between festivals, or recommend it to others (Fakeye & Crompton, 1992; Shani, Rivera, & Hara, 2009). In this sense, they become part of the local "we", even if they live most of their lives elsewhere. Being part of such a "we" over time also creates the potential for becoming more than just temporary visitors, or customers in a traditional sense, but even as co-creators in the further development of the field, including the regional businesses.

Following up the idea that a FCE creates its field just as much as the opposite, we will argue that the field in our case also involves all those shop-owners and institution representatives, etc., that were not part of the network, but who observed, during the event, how the others participated. Even if they were not part of the evaluation, we may assume that some of them started to consider how they might profit from participating in a future event. Others may have been inspired by the innovations they observed, or by the entrepreneurial spirit unfolding around them, to become more entrepreneurial or innovative themselves. If so, they too became part of the field in the sense that they, too, were affected or "configured" by what was taking place.

In the FCE literature, special emphasis is laid on the so-called field entrepreneurs, that is, those especially active in developing the field through active design, with an overt field-building agenda (Lampel and Meyer, 2008, Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). The leading field entrepreneurs in the SpARTathlo event were the NGO *Activate Now* who was also the first to propose the idea in the PAR group. As field entrepreneurs, we may also count the PAR group and the 56 members of the network.

By acting as field entrepreneurs, *Activate Now* has profited strongly. For *Activate Now* SpARTathlo was a pivotal occasion which proved that it has the capacity and the required expertise to contribute decisively to the design and implementation of local development actions. It up-scaled considerably its activities, it increased its recognition in the town and strengthened its record. Characteristically enough, as a result of the above, representatives of the municipality, in the first meeting of the PAR group after the implementation of the event, made several suggestions to the organization for future projects it could undertake. Among other proposals, *Activate Now* was invited to consider seriously and pursue the or-

ganisation of the big annual cultural events of the municipality by preparing event concept notes and submitting proposals.

## 6. Concluding remarks

We will now return to the research questions of the paper, and answer these questions by summarizing and reflecting on the above elaborations.

*Is it possible to describe and analyse events organised as part of an action research product, like the SpARTathlo in Spain, as an FCE?* As we have argued above, this is possible.

*What insights does such an analysis produce, that may be useful?*

The SpARTathlo event that serves as the case of this paper, was originally organised as part of a participatory action research project. In designing and reflecting on such projects, our main attention is typically directed at those directly involved in the project as stakeholders. Their aims and projects is the focus, and in evaluating the project, the main relevant question is how these stakeholder aims were realised. Even if exceptions may occur, this perspective is mainly limited to the interests of the stakeholders.

So, what about FCE theory? In our interpretation, it invites us to extend the perspective to include not only the stakeholders of the PAR project, but also all the others affected by it. The perspective, thus, is broadened beyond what we find in a typical action research project. FCE theory encourages us to explore everybody affected by the event, and how they may be involved in further action, to the benefit both to themselves and the others within the resulting field.

This may lead to the insight that the event had far more wide-reaching effects than one was originally aware of. At a motivational level, this may increase the enthusiasm of those organising the event, and thus mobilise more energy that may benefit the process. At a pragmatic level, it may engender a further reflection on how these other groups may be involved, to increase the total value produced by the event.

This may then also be part of the planning of new follow-up events. The pivotal questions are: How do we design an event so that it produces an optimal "configuration"? Who should we involve, and how? And, introducing the FCE concept of dramaturgy: what sort of dramaturgy during the event itself will engender optimal productivity in the effects? In the actual planning of an event, this may, for instance, be specified by the following questions:

- We have designed this activity for this group. Are there other groups that we could involve in this activity, whose presence would increase the general or specific value of the event?
- If we succeed in having these people attend, what could we do to increase the possibility not only that they leave satisfied, but also that they promote their satisfaction to others, and so that they return (preferably with friends) at a later time?

In both of these examples, the idea is that by a relative small addition to what has already been organised, a significant positive effect may be created. To be sure, finding the right addition requires imagination and creativity. But, as we see it, one of the great values of the FCE concept, is that it may inspire and guide such creativity. It does so by inviting us to

look for unexpected connections between persons, institutions, places and happenings, that may then be involved in the planning of future events. It also guides our creativity by inviting us to visualise the physical space in which the event is to unfold, its scenography, so to say, with the necessary supplies and other objects, both aesthetic and functional, as well as the optimal sequence of actions and events.

The FCE concept, moreover, reminds us that we sometimes come together, not only to complete a certain project, but as a by-product also to build a field, that is, to build and strengthen relationships. Again, the metaphor of dramaturgy is relevant, as it invites us to consider how human relationships and communication have more dimensions than those we see unfold, when people talk around a table. Talking may, of course, form a significant part of a FCE. Still, a FCE is also a dynamic space, where participants may interact in a number of other ways, displaying a more multidimensional version of their personality or identity, and thus, let the others discover more of who they are, and hopefully, in a way that is constructive for the further development of the field.

*How can such insights help improve the design of future events of this sort within action research?* The short answer is that all that has been said above should be taken into account when someone is planning action research events. This does not mean that every point made above will necessarily be of relevance to *all* such events. But they may be used as reflection points, and potential starting points for improving the planning. Firstly, FCE theory can improve the mapping both of stakeholders and also of others involved, that is the mapping of the "field" at the early stage of planning, so as to develop a more comprehensive analysis of the potential dynamics the intervention can generate. Consequently, conceiving a development intervention as a FCE can enhance our strategic planning process in that it helps us to understand complexity and at the same time, it provides us with a tool to address this complexity.

On the other hand, the above analysis has demonstrated that by using FCE theory as a heuristic tool, co-researchers or field entrepreneurs can significantly enhance the effectiveness of their intervention. FCE theory places the emphasis on the transformative dynamics of an intervention and helps us to look for the big picture, so to speak, "the forest and not only the trees". Thus, a development intervention conceived as a FCE, helps us to introduce well-designed activities that multiply the effectiveness of the action and capitalise on its wider effects, thereby enhancing its sustainability.

In conclusion, the case of SpARTathlo has demonstrated that PAR is an appropriate method to design and implement local socio-economic development interventions. The collaboration of relevant stakeholders with the support of university researchers, based on the principles of PAR, resulted in innovative development through actions which addressed real needs, allowing for the best use of existing local resources (e.g. highly skilled human resources, territorial resources).

The above discussion, also, demonstrates that PAR and FCE-theory can work hand in hand, as the latter fits well with the qualities of a PAR process, namely collaboration, openness, and transformative learning.

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# Action research with John Dewey's poetic and rhetoric pedagogy

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**Abstract**
In this article, we describe action research to test the hypothesis that the comprehension of John Dewey's philosophical and educational conceptions can help teachers to construct significant possibilities in teaching artistic languages and forming creative subjects. We consider that Dewey was a precursor of action research as a method for the constitution of the knowledge in the humanities, especially in education, and that the core of his ideas lies in an aesthetic theory. For this reason, his pedagogy can be called poetics, or rhetoric. So, we developed action research with a group of university students from a teacher training course, taking music as an object of reflection and articulation of practical activities. The theme of this experience was the Baião, Brazilian musical genre, chosen as an expressive way to produce aesthetic, rhetorical and poetic experiences. The results emphasise the potential of musical language to promote the association between aesthetic concepts and the Deweyan educational propositions, in order to provide aesthetic appreciation experiences and to foster the constitution of individuals aware of their potential.

**Key words**: John Dewey, art, education, music, rhetoric

**Una investigación-acción con la pedagogía poética y retórica de John Dewey**

**Resumen**
En este artículo relacionamos una investigación-acción para probar la hipótesis de que la comprensión de las concepciones filosóficas y educativas de John Dewey puede ayudar a los profesores a construir posibilidades significativas en la enseñanza de los lenguajes artísticos y en la formación de temas creativos. Consideramos que Dewey fue un precursor de la investigación-acción como método para la construcción de conocimiento en las humanidades, especialmente en la educación, y que el núcleo de sus ideas se encuentra en una teoría estética. Por esta razón, su pedagogía puede ser llamada como poética, o retórica. Así, desarrollamos una investigación-acción con un grupo de estudiantes universitarios de un curso de formación de profesores, tomando la música como objeto de reflexión y articulación de actividades prácticas. El tema de esta experiencia fue el Baião, un género musical brasileño elegido como una forma expresiva de producir experiencias estéticas, retóricas y poéticas. Los resultados enfatizan el potencial del lenguaje musical para promover la asociación entre conceptos estéticos y proposiciones educativas de Dewey, con el fin de proporcionar experiencias de consumación estética y promover la constitución de identidades conscientes de sus potencialidades.

**Palabras clave**: John Dewey, arte, educación, música, retórica

## Introduction

Tripp (2005) reports that there are several types of research which seek to integrate actions performed in practical situations with the search for knowledge about the reality in which such actions take place. The general procedure consists in identifying a problem, formulating hypotheses, planning solutions, producing interventions, and finally monitoring and evaluating such interventions, always aiming to achieve objective improvements in a given reality, the increase of knowledge about the practice investigated, and also about research. The presentation of the method called *action research,* which is attributed to Kurt Lewin, includes theoretical studies and research techniques validated by scientific communities, not only aiming at knowledge of the reality studied academically, but also to transform the current situation through actions that are continually problematised and evaluated.

Action research and other similar forms of research have been highly valued and used in the human sciences, especially in education, because in contrast to the usual methods, they promote conscious, intentional, dialogical and innovative actions, capable of contributing to the realisation of democratic ideals, and also to the possibility of improving the quality of teaching work, and the re-elaboration of the individual and social life of all those involved in the pedagogical process. Despite Lewin being the creator of this method in the 1940s, it may be said that other thinkers and researchers have previously adopted principles of argumentative and active *práxis*, and even methods that combined investigative and reflexive reasoning, research, mobilisation, and action; further studies have expanded the foundations of action research, causing proposals for the training of professionals, notably reflective teachers, and contributing to the emergence of new academic approaches that argue that action is essential (André 2001; Tripp 2005; Silva 2008; Rocha et al. 2016).

It is possible to place the American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859-1952) as a precursor of action research, as a defender of the relevance of this method to the constitution of the knowledge in the humanities. What supports this statement is the Deweyan concept of *reflexive thinking*, or *inquiry*, whose definition includes a general procedure that is very similar to action research. Dewey characterises reflexive thinking as a tool to guide everyday life, as well as guiding the complex formulations of science; it is from a significant problem that the individual seeks a solution, which involves raising information: theoretical, experiential, technological, historical, etc., to reason and articulate hypotheses that answer the initial question, to choose a course of action, and finally, to evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen hypothesis. The process of investigation is completed with the formation of a judgment, which is a moral judgment about the solution of the problem, and can be systematised for the elaboration of theoretical speculations. The solution is never definitive, because in the face of a new problem, albeit similar to the previous one, a new investigation should be initiated (Cunha 2005).

Considering Dewey's conceptions and procedures, we developed action research to test, in a practical way, the hypothesis that the comprehension of Deweyan principles related to the artistic development are able to help teachers to construct significant possibilities in the teaching of artistic languages and to form creative, expressive subjects, participants in the culture. The choice of artistic languages as the subject of this research was based on the thesis that the core of Deweyan ideas lies in an aesthetic theory, which originates a ped-

agogy that we call *poetics*, or *rhetoric*. The first section of this article will be devoted to substantiating this thesis.

The second section will focus on the organisation of the action research, which was done with a group of 23 university students between the ages of 18 and 25 from a teacher training course taught at University of São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, Brazil, that aims to empower them to teach children between 0 and 10 years of age, and to act in school management. The work took place in ten three-hour-long daily formative meetings focusing on art as theme, using the Brazilian musical genre named Baião as a mean to provoke aesthetic experiences. There is no exact information about the origin of this musical genre, but it is known that it was created in the Northeastern backlands and that the Lundu, popular Afro-Brazilian rhythm of the eighteenth century, is one of its earliest ancestors. The Baião came together with the diffusion of Lundu and other musical languages linked to festivals, dances and religious or profane rites. In this tradition, the most important musicians are Luiz Gonzaga, composer, singer and accordionist born in the state of Pernambuco, and Humberto Teixeira, a composer born in the state of Ceará. In the 1940s, both were responsible for styling, marketing and disseminating the Baião in other regions of Brazil, so that their work is still valued and respected, being currently alive in various media (Moraes 2013; Tatit 2014).

Our choice could have fallen on another musical genre, without prejudice to our goal: to promote the emergence of expressive forms through aesthetic experiences. Since Baião is present in other Brazilian rhythms very widespread among the young, we considered that this choice would facilitate the students' performance in the formative meetings. Besides that, the Brazilian curricula of Basic Education are governed by an official document that determines the compulsory teaching of art and the valuation of regional cultures (Brasil, 2010).[1] For expressing the cultural roots of Northeastern people, Baião is often indicated as content in the education of children and adolescents.

## Dewey's poetic and rhetorical pedagogy

Dewey's educational propositions can be qualified as poetic – in allusion to the Greek term *poïesi* – because they seek to legitimise creative and imaginative actions arising from the significance of reality, and raise new passions, mobilisations and changes of behaviour. Such propositions belong to a wide rhetorical tradition originated with the Sophists, to whom the domain of the *logos* attributes power to (re)create mental states and social conditions. The goal of rhetorical education is to develop people with power of expression, capable to take part equally in public spaces, capable of composing their individualities in tune with the reformulation of community values inseparable from personal happiness (Crick 2015).

Poetic creations express, in the proper moment and in a thoughtful way, what is, or can be, fair, ethical, adequate, and civic, and because of this they touch human passions more closely, mobilise thinking and intelligent action, in order to persuade individuals and groups that there are possibilities and meanings beyond those already experienced. The linguistic habit allows the domain of symbolic systems and linguistic techniques, promoting

1 Basic Education serves children, adolescents and young people between the ages of zero and 18 years, and also adults who did not attend school at regular age.

the development of the willingness to debate and enunciate; therefore, it allows individuals to elaborate their own experiences meaningfully and consciously. As the basis for social and internal communicative acts, linguistic habit favours the strengthening of the self, which feels increasingly capable, holder of the power to investigate, discuss, have an opinion and poetise (Poulakos 1995; Kinneavy 2002; Ericsson 2003).

Dewey's reflections (1964a, p. 145) on aesthetics and art show that the expansive and liberating power of artistic languages promotes the link between the formation of individualities with poetic-reflexive capability and the creation of democratic ways of life; because they motivate symbolisations and statements full of autonomy, the arts constitute the main language of education, making the processes of artistic reasoning become a model for philosophical thought. In addition to clarifying the principles that underlie the experiences which are truly capable of promoting the artistic development of the human being, Dewey's discourse reveals that it is in the realm of the arts that poetic and rhetorical educational experiences can be better implemented (Dewey 2005).

For Dewey (2005 p. 169), "an aesthetic experience", as well as "the work of art in its actuality", is "perception", a "full perception and its correlative, an object or event" is "accompanied by, or rather consists in, the release of energy in its purest form": "one that is organised and so rhythmic" (Dewey 2005, p. 184). Rhythm is an indispensable condition for life and for the elaboration of forms, natural and cultural, because in rhythmic processes the opposite energies are considered, not discarded, causing the generation of more energy, organised and balanced energy that culminates in the expansion or evolution of the whole. Therefore, an experience is aesthetic, a production is truly artistic, when the energies "became a rhythm in experience itself", transforming or expanding the own being (Dewey 2005, p. 169).

The Deweyan discourse expresses a concept that can be called *rhythmic aesthetic experience*. Both in the artistic practice and in the appreciation of artistic productions, it is essential to mobilise the emotions and to value the tensions in favour of the experience as a whole, as happens in the rhythmic movements: all means, materials, emotions, perceptions, etc., are experienced antagonistically in the process of noticing and/or doing, are taken as relevant elements that, exchanged and reorganised, provide the format of a whole that will be the starting point of new desires, ideas and plans (Dewey 2005; Dewey 1964b). In education, Dewey (1959a; 1959b; 2005) uses a similar notion to indicate the rhythmic treatment that should be given to students' personal inclinations, which should be directed towards the constitution of a richer and more fortified self, and the formation of goods collectively agreed upon; the enrichment of individuality intensifies linguistic exchanges, creates enunciative forces and practical procedures that put energies under pressure, trigger new organisational syntheses, and enables the expansion of the self.

Dewey (1958; 1959a) suggests that, in truly educational experiences, communication is decisive in forming everyday exchanges, in which approvals, disapprovals, and encouragement reside, all kinds of exchange that influence the formation of character and the progress of thought. Language, therefore, is a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and the formation of personalities capable of acting in favour of social transformation. Communication that aims to be educational is capable of arousing passions and broadening the field of desires, allowing new energies to be discovered and directed to the creation of new fields of

interests. By promoting reflection about the present and the past, communication opens the way for an imaginative reconstruction of the future.

Deweyan propositions on education and language renowned as poetic, or rhetoric, consider that the expression of people's varied readings of the world: how things were, how they are and how they could be, works as good "mediator *daimōns*" that helps individuals and groups to write with creativity the text of their lives, and thus being able to envision the exercise of *eudaimonia*, or happiness (Garisson 2010, p. 143). The relation of the human being to the poetic signs is marked by contingency, since each person responds to interactions with unique style, which makes it impossible to define completely and in advance the individual or social behaviours mobilised in the expressive forms; this indeterminacy is also lyrical, because it maintains the expectation that future dramatisations are better than the present ones, that they can boost ruptures with the established, and enable experimentation with more poetic alternatives.

Dewey's poetic and rhetoric pedagogy aims to create the best development and the best end for the learners, outlining the conditions to achieve these goals by enabling children and young people to desire and want what is beautiful, kind and lovely to themselves and to the environment in which they live (Hansen 2005; Cunha 2015). At first glance, human organisations, defined in physical-chemical terms, may seem limited; there is also the feeling that every new being that is born carries certain particular determinant colourings. But the fact is that all particularities are meant and directed within shared experiences; when individuals engage in increasingly complex and sublime interactions, they show unlimited and unexpected abilities which cannot be found in mechanical and non-aesthetic contexts, because they come from imagination, creativity and, above all, from hope of overcoming the existing (Dewey 1998; Dewey 2002).

In the instructional processes, observing behaviours and needs, being attentive to experiences and interactions, exercising dialogue and believing in the infinitude of the human being's cultural development are acts that bring forth the poetic imagination; the exercise of practical wisdom prudently leads internal linguistic agreements to the consolidation of thought and dispositions, leading to an attempt to discover what we can do in certain circumstances, so that we can update, in our relationships, the best and most creative possibilities, thus achieving the transcendence of the real selves. These ideas imply respect for individualities, because the expressive excesses of each one should not be silenced, but taken as problems to be investigated, in search of better directions; the poetic professional, who is wise and prudent, chooses to use hopeful hypotheses, avoids negative formulations, because he is convinced of his responsibility in the unique composition of the human being.

The goal of poetic and rhetorical education, therefore, is to train people with powers of expression, qualified for equal participation in public spaces, to compose their individualities in favour of community values inseparable from personal happiness. By possessing instruments, techniques and rhetorical resources, through the domain of linguistic symbolic systems, the learner acquires the condition to act dramatically in the ambit of his own thinking, having mental debates with contrasting argumentative lines, in order to make his own choices and organise his own conduct. In the political dimension, the person becomes capable of participating in the movements of collective life, defending renewed ideals, lovingly and effectively presenting transgressive positions which are essential for new syntheses and

rebalancing of customs. If it is possible to transform the self, it is also possible to rebuild society (Cunha 2005; Crick 2015).

Dewey believes that individual responses to educational interactions depend on how much the relationships established with different forms of association are alive, deep, and free; it also depends on the quality of the interests communicated and shared in the person's different experiences. The poetic and rhetorical formation of the individual aims to promote the freedom to define his identity, guiding him not with the intention to hinder, but to help focusing his interests. This training gives the individual tools to exercise the power of thought and action with autonomy. The signification and expression about the best and the becoming, supported by the wise, virtuous attitude, aim to offer concrete conditions so that the individuals know more, and have more freedom to question and act, engaging in activities that broaden the meaning of life, consubstantiating what is meant by individual and collective well-being.

In accord with Dewey (1964a p. 145), we can say that "the liberating, expansive power of art" is what provides the link between the formation of rhetorical individualities, expression of poetic-reflexive capacity, and the creation of a democratic lifestyle. Rhythmic aesthetic experiences liberate new impulses and thus moving old and deep-rooted habits, rooted and crystallised memories, which project themselves into new forms and enter a more fully integrated world, reaching a new configuration. Instrumentalised by language and knowing more meanings, the self gains autonomy and power to reorganise and redirect impulses, emotions and memories that generate internal conflicts; the self is convinced that it is possible to redirect such oppositions to the construction of an increasingly rich personality, recognising himself, still, as a citizen who contributes socially.

The Deweyan discourse, therefore, shows that, in the realm of the art, poetic and rhetorical educational experiences can be better accomplished (Dewey, 2005). The expansive power of a pedagogy based on artistic languages enables the consolidation of a poetic and rhetorical human identity, consequently enabling the experience of freedom of thought, debate and action, in search of collective and individual happiness and well-being. Without prescriptions or previously established methods, John Dewey establishes curricular principles for the teaching of the arts, exposing the means to a more humanised education, with emphasis on the promotion of the subjective and unique human identity, endowed with active power in the construction of itself, and in the transformation of the current political and social reality.

## Action research with Baião

Certain current curricular trends value and defend arts as languages and as an area of knowledge, whose specific contents need to be approached within social and cultural practices, respecting the learners' specific needs and learning conditions. When access and frequency to different human productions are extended, it is possible to understand that the arts constitute a way of leading the learner to signify the world and to understand that everyone can use the signs and instruments that make up the symbolic systems of artistic languages, in order to give meaning to things and experiences. These goals become means for greater ends, concerning the formation of the citizen's sensibility, the development of indi-

vidual capacity of dialogue, and the democratisation of culture, an irrevocable condition for the consolidation of a more equitable social (Penna 1999; Strazzacappa et al. 2005).

The general goals of these curricular tendencies are familiar to the ends sought by Dewey's poetic and rhetorical pedagogy, especially regarding the search for changes in the reality and the appreciation of dialogue. So, in our action-research, the actions developed by the researchers with the students were based on John Dewey's theory of research, which emphasises the exercise of reflective thinking, and in Deweyan principles about experiences truly capable of promoting the artistic development of the human being. In order to follow up and evaluate the activities, the researchers held daily meetings to review the planning; field, and filming journals were used as recording media.

The first stage of the work was to disseminate theoretical knowledge about Dewey's philosophical and educational conceptions, especially about the value of art in the formation of individualities and poetic and rhetorical teaching identities. Table 1 shows that the theoretical studies were carried out in two parts, aiming to lead the group of students to expand their repertoire of formal knowledge, which is indispensable to investigative and reflexive reasoning. Key aspects of Dewey's philosophical and educational thinking were presented and discussed, and subsequently, his assumptions about art and aesthetics were also presented and discussed. Avoiding dichotomising theory and practice, the formative meetings included musical experiences that fed on, or sustained, the discussions, which allowed us to learn from the organic nature of Dewey's work, which combines education, language and art for the consolidation of democratic contexts.

*Table 1*. Theoretical studies

| **Theoretical studies** | |
|---|---|
| Part I | 1. John Dewey: life and work |
| | 2. The philosophy of John Dewey: the pragmatism |
| | 3. Education as reflection and communication |
| | 4. Education and democracy |
| Part II | 5. The art in John Dewey |
| | 6. The art as an experience |
| | 7. The art as a language: education's main language. |
| | 8. The artistic development: appreciation, imagination and expression. |
| | 9. The expansive power and the rhetorical nature of art |
| | 10. Principles for the teaching of art |

Source: Theoretical programme organised by the researchers.

In a written record, the student Amanda highlighted similarities between the processes of artistic experience and reflective thinking: "Art in John Dewey is a process of real problematisation that leads to the investigation and organisation of materials and mobilises knowledges and experiences." Considering that "art as a vehicle for transformation" implies "a new way of working" in which "teachers would be primarily reflective teachers", Ivana connected the rhetorical and poetic power of artistic languages to the consolidation of a flexible school context, continuously problematised and, therefore, more democratic.

The theoretical discussions held in the first stage led the group to formulate a significant problem: what is it to have an aesthetic and artistic experience? Taking into account

the specialty of the researchers, it was proposed to deal with this problem within the realm of musical language, with experiences that had Baião as a theme, which draw the attention of the group, since both the National General Guidelines for Basic Education and the National Curricular Guidelines specific for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education indicate that the teacher should work with the four languages of the arts – visual arts, music, dance and drama – prioritising knowledge of Brazilian cultural manifestations and traditions, in order to enable children and teenagers to access the goods of their region.

Due to its importance in the educational and philosophical work of Dewey and mainly for its poetic and rhetorical character, the conceptualisation of aesthetic rhythmic experience underlaid the diverse experiences of the meetings with the students. We sought a context marked by the freedom of expression and dissemination of knowledge that is typical to cultural life, as well as the mobilisation of different languages: oral, written, poetic and graphic, in situations of appreciation of works of art and conversations about the cultural and musical universe being studied. An indication that the proposed experiments interested and incited the participants' imagination was the fact that the students indicated works by visual artists and musicians, suggesting their appreciation by the group: poetic activities involving Rap and Baião, contemporary productions with characteristics of Baião, songs that use this rhythm containing lyrics of critical-social character, etc. Mateus explained that, during the meetings, the reading of a text by William James, a philosopher studied by him in his research activity, became "even more interesting and argumentative", since the philosopher also approaches teaching as an art.

Evidence of experiences with rhythmic aesthetic experiences was noticed in the use of percussive instruments that allowed the exploration and learning of rhythmic figures; there was intense mobilisation of emotions, reactions, knowledge and questions that were gradually channelled and balanced for the acquisition of knowledge and artistic skills. The speeches, and even the facial and gesture expressions, showed opposite tensions; for example, the feeling of difficulty and the desire to be able to master a technique, the anxiety caused by the learning process and the pleasure obtained in the accomplishment of an action, the attention to the rule and the relaxation, the experience of the concentration and the relaxation, etc. Because they were not silenced, these forces were explained and treated by the group; besides the researchers, the colleagues themselves were touched by the needs of the colleagues, which made the practice of mutual help a constant; as long as they dominated the instruments and rhythmic possibilities, the mastery of harmony and fulfilment by the coordination of energies, in search of the moment of appreciation, became evident. Table 2 shows the progress of the activities during the formative meetings.

The students' evaluative reports and records emphasised the value of the experience of composing collectively, a practice that enabled autonomy to produce enunciations through another language vehicle, debating sound peculiarities of the instruments, melodic possibilities, the relationship between poetry and music, forms of recording the rhythmic figures in relation to the lyrics of the song etc. The group experience was also valued for embracing the individualities within the group, sometimes taking advantage of interests and facilities, sometimes encouraging learning and new creations.

*Table 2*. Significative problem

| **What is to have an artistic and aesthetic experience involving musical language?** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Information | Hypotheses (about the problem) | Choices and actions | Evaluation (instruments) |
| Continuous studies of the Deweyan theory | Being able to use instruments and elements of the symbolic musical system | Participation in musical experiences connected by a theme: continuous and integrated experiences | Conversations to evaluate and adequate the process. |
| Researches and conversations about music, parameters of sounds, stamps, pulses and rhythms | Being able to deeply appreciate and significate the appreciated | Knowledge and experience of the genre | Records: texts, field journal and recording |
| Researches and conversations about the genre Baião | Being able to express themselves musically | Appreciation of images and musical productions | Appreciation of the group's compositions |
| Exploring instruments and its possibilities of use | To feel touched | Significations and expressions through drawing, poetry and other languages | Final evaluation of the whole process |
| Knowledge of rhythmic figures | | Song writing in group, in Baião's rhythmic | |
| | | Enunciation by musical language | |
| Process permeated by experiences of aesthetic rhythmic quality | | | |

Source: Training activities developed by researchers with students.

Table 3 presents the written composition of one of the groups, whose main objective was not to elaborate a sophisticated poetry, but to create a correct musical form, achievable by all, a simple melody for a tuned performance. The group reported the satisfaction of being able to organise a composition that, although short, involved everyone's efforts to harmonise contrasting materials, emotions, needs, particularities and goals, accepting the difficulties and seeking to solve them in some way. Recalling the intrinsic relationship between theory and experience, they pointed out that in acting they were learning to think through musical language, making constant adjustments in the relation between material and the production of sounds; thus, the final expression was truly the synthesis of the movement of intelligent thinking lived by each individual and by the group.

According to the members of the group, the verses of the song entitled "Transformação" (Transformation) were composed considering the central goal of the Dewey's ideology, which is to mobilise people to transform their identities through poetry and rhetoric, thinking of a democratic way of life:

> Ei, meu povo, eu vim pra te mostrar / Hey, my people, I came to show you
> Que o papel do professor é o de transformar / That the role of the teacher is to transform

The students affirmed that the experiences of the formative meetings allowed them to imagine renewed educational actions, using the musical language to communicate a desirable re-

ality, which is the guarantee of the right of all to an education that enables development and transformation; for them, this should also be the experience of the teachers and students of the basic school: to poeticise to transform, and to transform to poeticise always more.

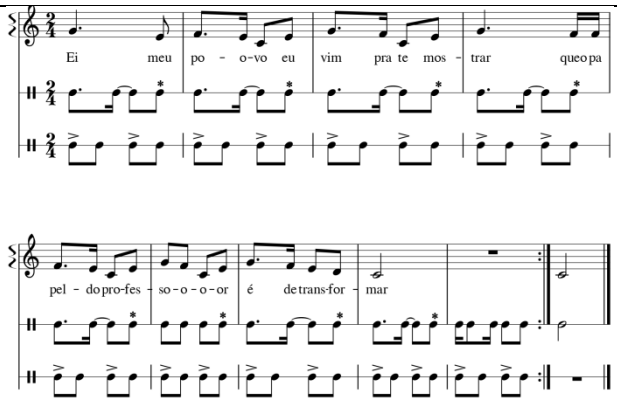
*Table 3*. Collective compositon 1 (excerpt)

**Transformação**

Alfaia, drum box, sonic blocks and tambourine.

Ganzá.

* Touch the rim or produce a high-pitched sound.




Source: Writing systematized by the researchers from audio made by the students.

Table 4 presents the writing of the composition of another group of students, whose objective was to communicate their own identification with the Deweyan theoretical references regarding the valuation of individualities and the channeling and organisation of energies, which gives expressive and communicative power to the people. Musically, they chose to highlight, in the composition, the voice, or timbre, of each instrument[2]. When faced with difficulties in maintaining the rhythm in the entrance and exit of the instruments, the group decided to connect all the musical route through the execution of the zabumba, which was under the responsibility of a student with more experience in the musical universe; the evolution made all the instruments converge to the same melodic line, meaning the harmonisation of the whole.

The composers also related the elaboration of the work with the accomplishment of a rhythmic aesthetic experience, because besides the effort to work with different energies, adjusting ideation, materials and procedures, there was the intention to emphasise the procedural conjugation of the instruments, which stood out, silenced and merged themselves, symbolising the pulse of materiality in art, which emphasises sometimes one, sometimes another dimension.

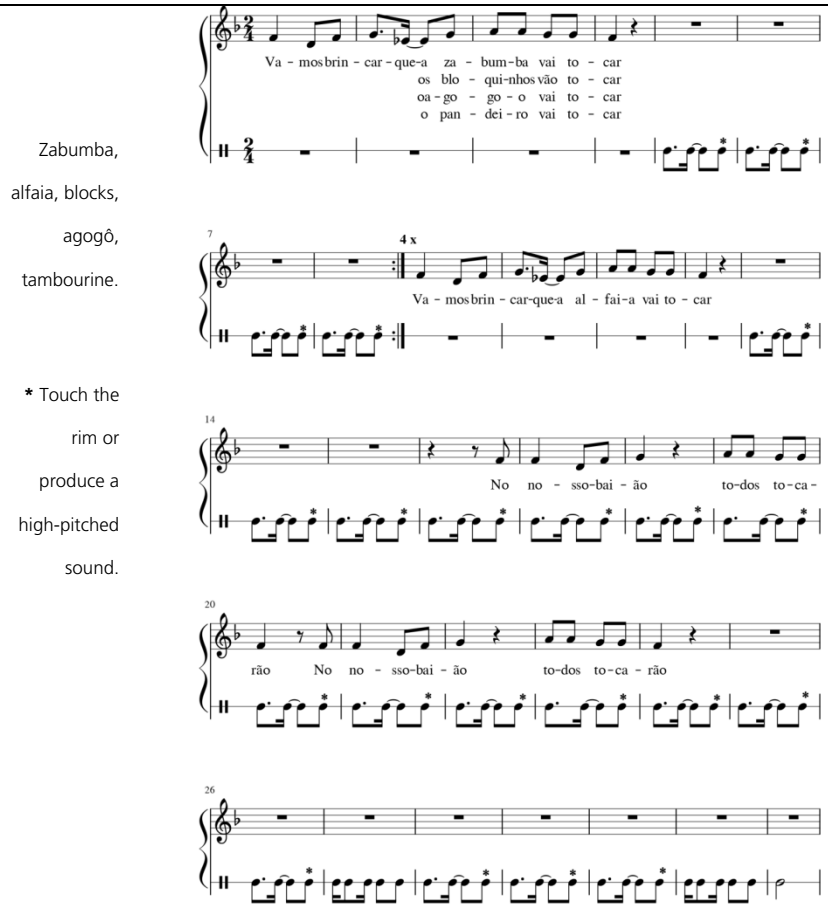
The verses of the song entitled "Vamos brincar" (Let's play) follow the movement of entrance of each instrument, followed by the combination of all of them:

2 The first eight bars are resumed four times; zabumba is the first instrument to be performed and quoted in the song and participates in all repetitions. From the second to the forth resumption of these bars, other instruments: blocks, agogô and tambourine, are executed, quoted and presented individually; alfaia is executed from the nineth to sixteenth bar with zabumba. From the seventeenth bar, all instruments are performed together.

Vamos brincar, que a zabumba vai tocar / Let's play, that the zabumba will play
Vamos brincar, que os bloquinhos vão tocar / Let's play, that the blocks will play
Vamos brincar, que o agogô vai tocar / Let's play, that the agogo will play
Vamos brincar, que o pandeiro vai tocar / Let's play, that the tambourine will play
Vamos brincar, que a alfaia vai tocar / Let's play, that the alfaia will play
No nosso Baião todos tocarão / In our Baião everybody will play
No nosso Baião todos tocarão / In our Baião everybody will play

*Table 4*. Collective composition 2 (excerpt)

**Vamos Brincar**




Source: Writing systematized by the researchers from audio made by the students.

The members of this group reported having a certain difficulty in maintaining the tuning of the voices due to the absence of harmonic instruments, but they declared themselves satisfied with the result of the work for having been able to operate the rhythm properly, which allowed introducing choreography in the presentation and execution of the instruments.

They stated that there were several initial conversations to come to an agreement on the goals of the composition, which were effectively made aware and organised during the investigative process, as the ends were being met, they would become the means for new constructions.

Regarding the theoretical bases of the activity, the group emphasised Dewey's assumption that the originality and independence of thought, pillars of creativity, are much more associated with the aesthetic and rhythmic process of production than with the courses of action initially conceived. The activity made them reflect on the current practices in basic school, especially on the inefficacy of actions without content, aimed solely at the fulfilment of protocols, in which the ends are supposedly achieved through a previously organised script; they remembered that the value of artistic proposals is based on the presentation of problem-situations that must be actively treated, so that their results are autonomous and authorial, causing feelings of fulfilment.

The cases used above to illustrate the work of the students reveal that the participants achieved a good theoretical comprehension and appropriate practical recontextualisation of Deweyan principles about art and artistic development, which helped them construct meaningful practice possibilities with the musical language, besides a reflection on the broader universe of the arts. Uniting theory and practice, the formative activities seem to have reached the goal of realising rhythmic aesthetic experiences, reinforcing the hypothesis that the Deweyan conceptions can be achieving the purpose of forming creative, expressive subjects and participants in the culture. We verify that the artistic work is only fully effective when there are efforts aimed at the configuration of aesthetic contexts, poetic elaboration, glimpsing the desirable, the utopian.

A theme that appeared during the evaluation of the activity by the students was the applicability of this method in early childhood education (children up to 5 years-old) and in the first years of elementary school, which involves children up to 10 years old. The students realised that not only music, through the exploration of songs, instruments or sonorous objects, but also other didactic resources, such as drawings, paintings, playdough, storytelling, etc., should be worked in conversations and in pleasant interpersonal relations, ensuring freedom to exchange ideas, experimentation, analysis of errors and revisions, in environments that favour the expansion of perceptions and autonomy for action; in short, in environments that Dewey characterises as democratic.

Works of art should not be the only objects of artistic education in schools; all the materials and processes that are part of students' everyday life can be transformed into aesthetic objects, according to a pedagogy that is dedicated to the development of rhythmic aesthetic experiences and, consequently, to the development of dialogic, reflexive and transformative thinking. Water games, games situations, conversation circles, participation in groupings, didactic or cultural tours, gardening or green areas activities, care of animals, etc. are all experiences capable of stimulating individuality and participation in collective actions, referring to the foundations of art. In this pedagogical approach, the organisation and functioning of schools must be undertaken responsibly by teachers and managers who are imbued with a new mentality that has repercussions on curricula and everyday experiences.

## Final considerations

Through John Dewey's philosophical and educational conceptions, with special attention to his aesthetic theory, it was possible to lead a group of university students, future teachers, to understand the relevance of experiencing aesthetic moments to poetically project the possibility of new paths for the teaching of the arts and, more broadly, for the formation of their own individualities. The work developed with the musical language in Dewey's poetic and rhetorical perspective suggests that the organisation of an environment full of meaning affects the passions and enables the dialogue in search of consensuses, impelling people to assume different forms of relationship and participation from the usual ones.

The students participating in the group activity with the music expressed intense and warm satisfaction when they finished their production, which shows the co-ordination of the physical and mental energies in their daily universe. Rhythmic aesthetic experiences led to aesthetic appreciation, in the form of emotional and rational perception that these acts were truly artistic, and that the imaginative and creative experience reached its peak. Such experiences enhanced the knowledge of those students, enabling them to the development of more actions in the school environment: as two participants who, in their elementary school curricular internships, elaborated a thematic project on Brazilian popular manifestations, with emphasis on musical experiences.

It should be noted that, in order to be effective in the performance of teachers who dedicate themselves to the teaching of musical language in schools according to a poetic and rhetorical pedagogy; it is essential to develop their musicality. According to Dewey (2002), it is not possible for a person to poetise the existence of a flowery desert if she never had the opportunity to participate in experiences related to the beauty of flowers. This reflection refers to the responsibility of initial teacher training courses, as well as the courses offered to those who are already teachers. The activity reported here suggests the possibility of allying theoretical studies with practical experiences in the field of music, which can be thought for other areas of knowledge as well.

Experiences that are rich in any artistic language, drawings and paintings, for example, promote the mobilisation of aesthetic sensibility and reflexive thinking, contributing to the construction of a self that recognises its potentialities. This singular identity, aware of its power, goes beyond the limits of individuality, becoming an inseparable part of the collective; a social and political self, according to Deweyan conceptions, capable of recognising its own limits and embracing forms of expression of others, a self that gratifies itself with its personal action and, at the same time, situates this action within significant experiences for common ends.

In order for music, and this is true for arts in general, to be integrated into the school context, it is necessary for educators to be sensitive to aesthetic experience, to be able to appreciate different musical genres and to understand artistic manifestations as effective possibilities for communication. The formation of the sensitive citizen depends, therefore, on having a sensitive teacher, but it is also necessary to take into account the actions of managers, who are responsible for the organisation of an environment open to experimentation and innovation inside the classroom, in order to bring into school the variety and richness of the cultural life of the community.

The value conferred by Dewey on aesthetic experiences that foster the linguistic domain and satisfy the will to power – the power to speak, to argue, to do, to transform, to be a citizen

– contributes to reflect not only on the arts, on the teaching of the arts or on education in general, but also on research methodologies. For Dewey (2005), art is valuable to human associations because it transports moral and ethical goods, touches the human being in such a way that transcends the material limits of art, thus helping to recreate the impulse and the thought, and so feeding the will to power, the desire to imagine, create and recreate senses and realities. Artistic and aesthetic experience: both that of the artist and that of the teacher, the student and the researcher, leads people to know themselves and to transform themselves internally. When researchers use a method that allows reflection on the practice, using a dialogic and participatory approach, the research is also permeated by aesthetic and artistic qualities. Action research has this potential, since it is capable of modifying the researchers' internal dispositions, giving them the power to imagine and project new meanings to the researched reality.

The Deweyan propositions about reflexive thinking, that are developed through artistic and aesthetic experiences, teach us that scientific research can be lively and enriching, not limited by techniques or protocols unrelated to the moral values of the researcher. To make it happen, it is necessary to establish ethical agreements among all those involved in research, so that everyone finds space to constantly plan and revise the means and ends they seek, so that their actions are not sterile, and can produce new syntheses of the self and of imaginative thinking.

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# An action research approach to introduce Dalcroze Eurhythmics Method in a community of older adults as a promising strategy for fall prevention, injury recovery and socialization

*Rodney Beaulieu, Hyun Gu Kang and Shoko Hino*

**Abstract**
A community health programme was piloted at San Marcos Senior Activity Center in California over a two-year period, patterned from the Jaques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics method known to reduce fall rates by half, and improve cognition and mood in older adults. The programme involved live improvised music to cue synchronised and improvised body movements, memory and attention tasks, and cognitive-motor games, with collaborative support from older adult participants and kinesiology students. This article presents the older adults' perceptions on the strengths and challenges of the programme, and their recommendations for making improvements in the next action research phase. (Feedback from the kinesiology students appears in a follow-up article.) Focus group interviews revealed that the strengths of the programme included: 1) social and physical pleasure; 2) improved health, including balance, gait, recovery after an injury, confidence in mobility, metamemory skills, and a greater understanding of health promotion and fall prevention strategies; and 3) the collaborative nature of individualized support. Challenges during the first year included transportation, scheduling, and differences in skill levels among participants, however, these were resolved by the second year. Recommendations for improving the programme in the next action research phase include: continuing the current practice, attracting more participants who could benefit from the programme and retaining them, and securing funds to offset costs.

**Keywords**
Community-based programme, Jaques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics, fall prevention, older adults, kinesiology, health, exercise.

**Un abordaje de la investigación-acción para introducir el método Dalcroze Eurhythmics en una comunidad de adultos mayores como estrategia prometedora para la prevención de caídas, recuperación de lesiones y socialización**

**Resumen**
Un programa de salud comunitaria fue desarrollado en el Centro de Actividad Senior de San Marcos en California durante un período de dos años, modelado a partir del método Jaques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics, conocido por reducir las tasas de caída a la mitad, y mejorar la cognición y el estado de ánimo en los adultos mayores. El programa envolvió música improvisada en directo para señalar movimientos del cuerpo sincronizados e improvisados, tareas de memoria y atención, y juegos cognitivo-motores, con apoyo colaborativo de participantes adultos mayores y estudiantes de kinesiología. Este artículo presenta las percepciones de los adultos mayores sobre las fortalezas y los desafíos del programa, y sus recomendaciones para hacer mejoras en la próxima fase de la investigación-acción. (La devolución de

los estudiantes de kinesiología aparece en un siguiente artículo). Las entrevistas con los grupos focales revelaron que las fortalezas del programa incluyeron: 1) placer social y físico; 2) mejora de la salud, incluyendo el equilibrio, el modo de andar, recuperación después de una lesión, confianza en la movilidad, habilidades de metamemoria, y una mayor comprensión de las estrategias de promoción de la salud y prevención de caídas; y 3) la naturaleza colaborativa del apoyo individualizado. Los desafíos durante el primer año incluyeron transporte, programación y diferencias en los niveles de habilidad entre los participantes, aunque, estos fueron resueltos en el segundo año. Las recomendaciones para mejorar el programa en la próxima fase de la investigación-acción incluyen: continuar con la práctica actual, atraer a más participantes que podrían beneficiarse del programa y conservarlos, y asegurar fondos para compensar los costos.

**Palabras clave**: programa basado en la comunidad, Jaques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics, prevención de caídas, adultos mayores, kinesiología, salud, ejercicio.

## Introduction

About one in three U.S. Americans aged 65 or older falls each year, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study (Stevens et al. 2012). In 2014, about 27,000 older adults died as a result from a fall, 2.8 million required emergency treatment related to a fall and of those, 800,000 had to be hospitalised. Bergen et al. (2016) found that 28.7% of older adults experienced at least one fall a year. Of those, 37.5% required medical treatment or had to restrict activity for at least a day. One in five falls results in a serious injury, such as broken bones or a head injury (Alexander, Rivara & Wolf 1992; Sterling, O'Connor & Bonadies 2001) and falls account for the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries (Jager, Weiss, Coben & Pep 1992).

Without intervention methods to prevent falls, we can expect the frequency of injuries to increase as the number of adults over 65 continues to grow. For example, in 2010, 13% of the population was 65 or older and in 2015 the percentage grew to 15. Given that life expectancy is now longer than ever historically (Arias 2015), and that the death rate from fall injuries for United States older adults nearly doubled between 2000 (29.6 per 100,000) and 2013, from 29.6 to 56.7 per 100,000 (Kramarow et al. 2015), preventing falls is an urgent health agenda priority. Research has shown that exercise programmes can reduce the risk of falls among older adults in the community (Gillespie et al. 2012; Lord et al. 2000). In their study of ambulatory and cognitively intact adults aged 60-75 years, Province et al. (1995) identified several techniques to be beneficial: endurance training, flexibility exercises, balance platform, Tai Chi (dynamic balance), and resistance training.

Older adults experience decline in cognitive function and higher rates of depression, and therapeutic intervention has been shown to improve wellbeing (Hill & Stigsdotter-Neely 2005; Hyler 2013). This finding fits the numerous sociological studies summarized by Umberson & Montez (2010) about the value of social relationships and its connection with health and wellbeing. Because enjoyment is positively correlated with cognitive functioning, as Theone and her colleagues found (2016), we assume our programme, Jacques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics (JDE), was a cognitive benefit for the participants in this study as confirmed by their own accounts.

Researchers at the University Hospital of Geneva, Switzerland applied a novel programme based on Jaques-Dalcroze Eurhythmics (JDE) that involve physical movement and multitask activities accompanied by live piano music. Long-term participants exhibited gait similar to that of young adults (Kressig et al. 2011). Quantitative results from their studies found the method to be a beneficial for older adults who were at risk for falls. In their 12-month controlled study, Trombetti et al. (2011), found that JDE intervention resulted in improved gait and balance for community-dwelling older adults, and reduced the rate of falls and the risk of falling. Another study by members of the same research team showed the same treatment for community dwellers increased cognitive function and decreased anxiety (Hars et al. 2014a). And, in their four-year follow-up study (Hars et al. 2014b), the 23 subjects who continued a programme with JDE concepts had better gait and balance than the 29 control group subjects who discontinued the programme, and they had reduced risk of falling.

With the goal of achieving similar results for improving or maintaining physical and cognitive health, and preventing falls, qualitative action research was applied to plan, implement and evaluate a community-based programme with a California older adult population. Our goal was not to replicate the earlier studies with supportive quantitative data. Instead, using a discovery process that involved collaboration between older adults at San Marcos Senior Activity Center, health science students, a licensed JDE instructor and professors from California State University, a two-year pilot programme was implemented with the ongoing goal of refining the programme through action research. Building from the prior JDE studies based on quantitative findings to support the efficacy of interventon (Hars et al. 2014a, 2014b; Trombetti et al. 2011), this qualitative action research me delivery. Unlike the earlier controlled studies where older adult participants were recruited from clinical settings and did not require assisted mobility devices, participants in this study were from the community, some required mobility devices, and none were excluded from participation. And, unlike prior studies on JDE, students and older adults collaborated in the development of the programme. This study represents three semesters of action research phases to develop and refine the activities so JDE could be adapted to a U.S. older adult population. JDE has a long history in Western Europe as a method for learning musical expression, and while it has taken roots in the U.S. for the same purpose (Bachmann 1991), it has not been applied in the U.S. to improve or maintain physical and cognitive health as an exercise programme for community-based older adults, nor has it been refined to fit individualised needs through action research methods. Action research is ideal for developing this programme because it engages the stakeholders whose lives are affected by an urgent health problem, and it represents an attempt to improve human conditions and professional practice (Reason & Bradbury-Huang 2013; Stringer 2014). This study was driven by questions to generate feedback from the older adult participants to identify effective strategies, areas that need further development, and develop strategies for making improvements in an ongoing programme: What are the strengths of the programme? What are the challenges? What do older adult participants recommend for making improvements? The first question is patterned from appreciative inquiry, an action research tradition that emphasises building from the positive aspects of practice (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005; Reed 2007; Whitney et al. 2010), and the next two are from action research approaches for identifying problems and developing solutions (Kemmis & McTaggert 2007; Lewin 1946; Sagor 2005, 1993;

Stringer 2008a, McNiff & Whitehead 2011). The programme began with conversations among university faculty who collectively specialize in the following domains: nursing and applied field experience; music therapy and applying the Dalcroze method; kinesiology and field experience; and health promotion. A mutual interest in responding to a public need in the older adult community brought them together to implement a programme to prevent falls, enhance recovery after an injury, and stimulate cognitive functioning. A condensed history of how the action research was planned and implemented over the course of three semesters is summarised in Appendix A.

## Research Context

Based on music appreciation and somatic awareness, the community health programme was designed to serve older adults with physical therapy and strength-building activities, and engage memory and attention. Over the course of three semesters, older adults participated in 10 to 14 JDE classes once or twice weekly, supported by students from the Kinesiology Department at California State University San Marcos who supplemented the activities with warm-up, cool-down, strength-building and flexibility exercises.

JDE is a music education method that originated in Switzerland in the early twentieth century and continues to be a popular pedagogical method worldwide for training music students of all ages. For older adult classes, activities are designed to improve motor and cognitive skills such as listening, attention, memory, coordination, balance, and multi-tasking with progressively more complexity (Farber & Parker 1987). Activities require participants to move with the music, repeat movements they were taught earlier, synchronise body actions with musical rhythms, follow partner's movements, react immediately to random signals, repeat or echo movement sequences, interact with other people and objects, and follow verbal instructions and musical cues. Other activities are highly structured, requiring quick reaction time, planned responses, spatial orientation and performing simultaneous tasks, and further activities required creative improvisation. Applied at San Marcos Senior Activity Center, the goal of these activities was to activate the participants' sensory-motor skills associated with balance and mobility (e.g., weight shifting, balancing, flexing joints, co-ordinating muscle movements) and cognitive skills associated with interacting with the environment (such as attention, memory, decision making, dual tasking, planning, improvising). We chose JDE because of its successful tradition for implementing physical exercises in music education, and we wanted to explore how it could be adapted to a U.S. community-based older adult population by getting qualitative feedback from the participants. Our programme development approach was a progression of discovery phases, beginning with input from stakeholders and using feedback to make improvements as new understandings were acquired. Results from this cycle of research was intended to inform the next cycle as ongoing action research.

## Research Methods

Action research is a systematic approach for improving practice and quality of life, and it is practiced in a variety of ways, depending on the epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions (Beaulieu 2013). For example, some action researchers support a collaborative participatory process with stakeholders (Hall 1992; Hero & Reason 2001; Kemmis & McTaggart 2007; Park 1992; Park et al. 1993) while others engage in an autonomous process to improve individual practice, such as teacher research (Lytle & Cochran-Smith 1992; McKernan 1991; McNiff 2005; Stringer 2008). Some focus on problems and solutions (Freire 1970; Kemmis & McTaggert 2007; Lewin 1946; Park et al. 1993; Sagor 2005, 1993; Stringer 2008a; Whitehead & McNiff 2006), others ignore problems altogether, such as appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005; Reed 2007; Whitney et al. 2010), and others minimise preconceptions altogether, such as grounded action (Poonamallee 2009; Simmons & Gregory 2003). The design of this study was inspired by the teacher research tradition, whereby the research goals are first defined by the teachers (e.g., Creswell 2005; McKernan 2013; McNiff 2005; Sagor 2010; Stringer 2008). Our goal in this approach was to introduce a new programme to serve the older adult community, work with the participants to refine it, and determine what else is needed to improve efficacy. This approach was guided by Mertler's (2012) action research model: 1) identifying and limiting the topic, 2) gathering preliminary information, 3) reviewing related literature, 4) developing a research plan, 5) implementing the plan and collecting data, 6) analysing the data, 7) developing a plan for another phase, 8) sharing and communicating results, and 9) reflecting on the process. As with most approaches, the steps in this process overlapped with one another, whereby strategies for implementing activities were augmented by input from the participants as a collaborative effort.

## Participants

Older adult participants between the ages of 65–94 years were recruited from several regional sources, mostly women and several men, regardless of their physical state: three retirement communities through in-house communications, a major newspaper, and professional meetings that promoted services for older adults. During the first semester, 24 older adults participated in the programme, but about 25% dropped out in the first month. When asked why they dropped out, explanations were mainly lack of interest, not wanting to sign an informed consent form for research, or a release of liability for unrelated medical concerns and travel constraints. Of those who continued the programme over the year, attendance was irregular for about 50% of the participants. Explanations for irregular attendance included medical concerns, irregular transportation, and scheduling problems. Eight participants attended regularly through the first year and a half. This irregular pattern of adherence resembles findings by Picorelli et al. (2014). In four of the studies they reviewed, older adults participated in 65% to 86% of the available sessions, and in five other studies, participation ranged between 58% to 77%. A review of community-based exercise classes for fall prevention by Nyman & Victor (2012) showed that adherence ranged between 42% to 79%.

A cohort of Kinesiology undergraduate students participated during each semester as part of their laboratory experience to learn about aging, physical therapy and contribute to the programme design, implementation and evaluation. Their feedback will appear in a follow-up study as the focus of the current work is on the older adults' feedback.

## Planning and Implementation

During the earliest planning phase of the programme, we identified the scope of the programme through dialogue with several parties: 1) staff members at the San Marcos Senior Activity Center; 2) faculty members from the Kinesiology Department, the Human Development, and the School of Nursing at California State University San Marcos; 3) staff members at Health and Human Services Aging and Independence Services for the County of San Diego; and 4) Kinesiology students who participated in the programme. During the first semester, we drafted a research plan together by seeking answers to the following questions. What resources are needed? How do we recruit older adults to participate? How do we tailor JDE to fit what the literature indicates for physical and cognitive exercises? How do we engage the students and older adults in the activities? The result was an initial plan that included: 1) publicity, recruitment and information sessions for older adults; 2) scheduling programme sessions; 3) designing preliminary activities and instructions; 4) training students and co-constructing their feedback system; 5) engaging older adults and co-constructing their feedback system; and 6) developing a system for programme management, data collection and record-keeping.

Over the course of three semesters, the programme was piloted with a variety of activities. Some of the activities were designed and led by the authors, some by the students, and some by the older adults. At the conclusion of each activity, together we critically assessed the benefits of it, the challenges of engaging in it, and alternative approaches to fit individual needs. This process encouraged each person to contribute to the activity and participate at their comfort level. For example, some older adults had difficulty standing while catching and passing a ball, so they chose to sit for this kind of activity. Others chose to increase the complexity of activities by adding more challenging steps for themselves. Thus, while there was a general frame for each group activity, each member modified it to fit their own ability and expressive desire. And while activities were mostly interactive, some encouraged participants to move independently in improvised routines (e.g., dance steps, controlled walking). Two of the regular participants required a gait belt, supported by students to prevent falling during standing activities.

## Data Collection

Collecting data was an ongoing process, and what was learned along the way was applied to update plans and refine activities, a process that is common in qualitative action research. At the end of each of the last two semester sessions, a focus group discussion was conducted with the older adults to encourage critical reflection and provide data about their perceptions for the next semester of programme planning and implementation. One focus group

had 15 members (13 women and 2 men) who participated in the first year, and the second group had 8 members (7 women and one man) who participated regularly since the onset of the programme. With the goal of using the input to improve the programme, participants were asked to identify the strengths and challenges of the programme, and offer recommendations for making improvements. Participants provided consent for participation as approved by the university institutional review board. Three open-ended questions were posed so participants could freely orient to topics that were most salient to them, and these served as the research questions for this study:

1. What were the strengths of this programme, or what did you like most?
2. What was most challenging, or what did you not like?
3. What do you recommend for improving the quality of the programmes?

Follow-up questions were asked to delve further in the responses, following Krueger & Casey's (2014) approach for getting more specific information to target research goals, and following Stringer's (2014) action-oriented framework for conducting focus groups with a facilitator, questions were displayed on a chart, each participant had an opportunity to respond in a respectful environment, and responses were recorded and posted to a chart in their own words. Analysis involved a collaborative process to summarise responses and identify common features, identify divergent perspectives, rate the level of agreement on interpretations through a voting procedure, and rank-order the priority of issues. Focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed, and each principal investigator independently crosschecked the data for reliability against: 1) the charted raw data and the collaborative interpretations, 2) their own observations of the programme sessions, and 3) each other's independent interpretations. Next, we applied Mertler's (2012) inductive process for reducing information and organising data patterns and themes in a framework for presenting key findings. To that end, we searched for words or phrases that reflected specific events or observations that were repeated throughout the data. Parsons and Brown (2002) described this qualitative research process as "systematically organising and presenting the findings of the action research in ways that facilitate the understanding of these data" (p. 56). To validate the accuracy of findings, Creswell's (2003) member-checking approach was also applied by asking participants to review raw data, analytic interpretations and reports, and clarify and expand on the information.

As indicated earlier, focus group discussions were also conducted with the students to invite their feedback for refining the planning and implementation of the programme, and the findings will be reported in a follow-up article. Feedback was mostly focused on pedagogical issues, such as corresponding lectures, exams, and assignments, and feedback regarding the programme activities was routinely applied to make refinements.

## Results

When asked about the strengths of the programme, two dominant themes kept emerging through the focus group discussions: enjoying the social interaction and enjoying the activities. As researchers concerned about strategies for improving health, we expected comments to opened-ended questions to be oriented around health issues first, but participants initially oriented to social and pleasurable aspects of the programme, framed around de-

scriptors such as "fun." We had to dig deeper with follow-up questions to learn more about the potential health benefits of the programme. Findings in this section are summarised to first highlight enjoyment as the dominant theme, followed by topics the authors were especially interested in exploring: changes in mobility, balance and health; potential for enhancing recovery after an injury; understandings of fall prevention and health promotion; and the value of collaborative engagement for designing and implementing activities.

## Social and Physical Pleasure

The most dominant response about the strengths of the programme revolved around enjoying the social interaction and the physical activities. When asked to identify the strengths of the programme in an open-ended format, social stimulation was the first response in both focus groups. Participants talked at length about their pleasure from interacting with the student assistants. As an example, the oldest participant said:

> *The socialisation adds a lot. Some seniors are homebound and don't get to interact much with other people. The kids really care about us. My two [students] are now really good friends. We talk every few days. Andrew's always checking in on me. And, he's always smiling. I don't know if I'm enjoying this more or if he is. What a sweet boy.*

Note that she emphasised being social versus being socially isolated, and that a new friendship provided frequent interactions that were enjoyable. A second person made a similar comment that characterised the social interaction as being pleasurable:

> *The students were great, so polite and friendly. You could tell they really wanted to help. They would try all sorts of different things to get us moving. And we all laughed so much. It was so much fun, I'm telling you. Very heartwarming to see how much they cared.*

Others had similar comments:

> *The kids [students] were so nice and they had fun too. They really cared and made sure we were safe, and they weren't stressed. They were so sweet.*

> *I don't interact with young ones much, so I enjoyed having them around. For me, the students made it so wonderful and fun. And, they made mistakes too, so we could all laugh together. They enjoyed it as much as us.*

Participants also shared comments that reflected a reciprocal appreciation for each other as "friends" in a "fun" social context.

> *I'm a social person, not the type who's going to sit around at home and do nothing… … I met so many nice friends here... …I'm having so much fun meeting you all.*

> *I met so many good people here. We play together, throw balls at each other, act silly if we want to and nobody cares. And, it's so much fun. They say it's good to laugh. Well I'll tell you, we do lots of laughing. People here are lots of fun.*

> *Yes, the folks in this class are amazing and I made some friends here. I feel blessed to have you all here.*

One participant who required a gait belt for activities alluded to the potential for embarrassment, yet the social dynamics did not produce this outcome. *"No one made me feel uncomfortable or there's no bashing competition, no judgment. People are wonderful and supportive."* Another person supported this view, *"There's an acceptance of each other no matter what, and it feels safe."*

Participants also expressed appreciation for the JDE instructor who directed most of the activities and played the piano through the exercises. *"Shoko was great, and so clear and helpful. She plays* so *nicely and makes it look easy, and you can tell she really cares about everyone*." Another said, "*She's so thoughtful and sweet. She knows just how to make things work for us and at the right speed. Sometimes she sped it up a little and I would make mistakes, but she brought it right back so we could do it."* Others added similar appreciative comments:

> *I like that she listened to us and played the songs we love, and that she was so sensitive about what we want. I like that she played stuff from my generation, songs I knew and love, and it was so cool that she sometimes played it differently to keep it interesting.*
>
> *It was so nice to hear her playing with such precision. Her timing, the fun added parts, and twists. What a nice touch.*
>
> *You could use CDs for this class and get similar results, but it just wouldn't be the same. You wouldn't have the same rhythm, the in-the-moment touches she makes, and the way she plays just for us.*

Comments about the music also reflected enjoyment in the corresponding physical activities: *"The music had a beat that helped us move without bumping into each other. It really made me want to move and keep on going. And, those songs, oh, they were so much fun. I could have gone on and on."*

All the activities involved physical movement, sometimes in place, stretching and extending limbs, throwing and catching a ball, and shifting weight. Some activities involved dancing alone, with a partner and switching partners, all accompanied by music. These social and interactive elements of JDE make it distinctively more enjoyable than other forms of physical therapy that participants experienced:

> *In physical therapy, you just follow what the therapist tells you and it's boring. It's like going to the gym where you repeat the exercise over and over again. You know? And, that's not much fun. But, the dancing part with the music - - that made it so much fun and exciting. You just want to keep on moving. You can't stay still. I was always moving around. And you guys were too.*
>
> *See that's why this class is good because you're moving around and it's fun. You can go to physical therapy and they work with you, and they probably help you more directly. But it is not as much fun as this.*
>
> *Physical therapy is great, but that's not like the real world where you're running around. This class has us moving more like how we should be.*

It is relevant to note that laughter and other forms of social affirmations accompanied most of the above comments. For example, "*oh yeah*" was frequently expressed in various ways,

along with head-nodding, chuckles and broad laughing. Laughter was also a common expression during the JDE activities. According to Ekman (2007) these social cues are universal indicators of enjoyment.

## Improved Health

All the participants reported having improved mobility, balance, and health as a result of being engaged in the programme. The oldest member who was 94 years old claimed that she did not walk much after suffering a fall two years earlier, mainly because she felt too insecure. "*Now, I feel more secure. I'm not as afraid as I used to be. I think it's done me a lot of good. Even if you never even walk a lot. But, I notice the difference. I'm moving more on my own."* She also claimed that the programme improved her mental health, "*It definitely improved my mental health too. I always feel better when I come out. And, I look forward to coming back every time."* Another older participant added, "*My balance is really bad and I'm over 80, so I have to keep working on that. This class is a big help so I can keep improving."*

Another person said, *"I love this programme because it is keeping me active and healthier. I know this programme has helped me because my balance is getting better and I feel better."* This kind of sentiment was repeated by another participant, *"I always knew exercise was important, but I was getting lazy and I could feel it. I'm glad I found this class because I'm starting to feel strong again."*

One of the youngest participants, a 64-year-old male, described his health as excellent. He participated in other activity programmes and claimed that JDE was his favorite because: "*It makes me more aware of what I can do and what I got to do to get healthier. You got to keep going or your body won't keep up. It all starts falling apart. I'm so grateful for this class because it helps me stay active. I really need it. We all do."* And, reinforcing the earlier theme of "fun," he added, "*For me, this programme just makes me feel better because it's fun and to keep on trying."*

When asked for examples of improved health in a follow-up question, the oldest person said*, "Well, when you know it you know it. I know my body and I feel better."* Another person added, *"I can stretch more than before. And, when I'm at home and feeling tense, I just do the exercises I learned here and I feel much better."* Another added, *"I'm losing weight, but still eating the same, so isn't that proof? I feel great and this class helps me because I'm moving more."*

Several participants claimed that the programme gave them greater confidence in mobility, inspiring more activity. As one person put it, "*I feel more confident now and less afraid, so I'm being more active and more independent than before."* While the term "confidence" was not used in other accounts, semantic variations reflected a sentiment of having less fear and more confidence in mobility. For example, one person claimed to feel more secure with her mobility after suffering a fall, "*I got hurt falling some time ago and that made me scared of falling again. It stays with you no matter what. But, this class showed me I can do it if I set my mind to it*." Another person expressed a similar view, "*I feel more secure. You know, not afraid to push myself. I hope you continue the class because it keeps me going."* Another added, "*I'm feeling much better about moving on my own."*

Several participants who suffered an injury about two years earlier claimed that JDE helped them recover and improved their balance and gait. Examples of their statements follow.

*I had fallen so I had to recuperate. My balance was really bad but I came a long way. That's why I'm taking this class. I'm okay now because this class helps.*

*My chiropractor said that this was the best thing I could do for my back pain and leg pain. He said I could see improvement. Now, I haven't seen him in weeks because I really feel I'm getting much stronger with just this.*

*I was wearing a back brace, which I thankfully don't have to wear anymore. I definitely feel better now. It's a long road and this class is helping.*

*A long time ago I injured my shoulder from straining too hard. The kids in this class (student) showed us how to warm-up first and go slower. Now, when I'm going to do anything strenuous, I stretch first, and go slow and take my time.*

*I had knee surgery a year ago and I couldn't lean forward or turn, and this class made me more aware of how to move and I walk more easily.*

Of the eight participants in the second focus group interview, all but one person indicated that the programme improved health. For him, the programme helped him maintain health: "*The quality of my health is already high, but it is necessary to keep a stable level. For maintenance, you have to do a minimal amount.*"

All the participants claimed that the programme helped them improve their memory abilities through greater awareness of their own memory capabilities, the processes involved in self-monitoring, and strategies to aid retention. The following conversation captures several participants' perceptions during the second focus group interview.

Interviewer: *You said something about memory exercises as being helpful. Would you please say more about that?*
Participant 1: *Yes, it helps memory.*
Participant 2: *It seems to me that if I'm able to do the exercises and remember them over time, I'm improving.*
Participant 3: *Well, would you say it prevents memory degeneration, just maintains it, or actually improves it?*
Participant 4: *It improves it.*
Participant 5: *Yes, it makes it better.*
Participant 2: *Yes, it improves.*

All eight participants from the second focus group, who participated for a full year, believed the programme improved their memory abilities. When asked for evidence, the following examples were offered.

*It increases the focus and attention, for sure. You have to pay attention, and listen to the music, and we have to keep pace with it, slow down and sometimes go faster, and then watch where you're going. There's a lot you have to remember.*

*It's made me aware that I've got to pay closer attention to the sequence of things, not just go along without thinking about the next steps. Shoko has us moving every which way and there's lots of steps to remember on how to get there. I'm getting better at it I think.*

Though pre- and post-memory tests could not show changes in abilities, anecdotal accounts reveal metamemory skills – that is, a heightened understanding of how memory operates.

Participants also expressed greater awareness of strategies for preventing a fall. One participant mentioned lateral and backward movements as potential actions that lead to a fall, which has been supported by research (Hilliard et al. 2008; Manckoundia et al. 2008), and strategies reinforced by JDE to be more effective in preventing a fall:

> *One of the most important things for seniors to be able to do is have lateral movement, to move sideways, to move backwards, because that's when it's most likely for falls or to break hips. And, Shoko's very careful about encouraging us to walk backwards or to sidestep. Now when I'm in the kitchen, if I want something behind me, instead of turning around, I back up and get what I was going to get and go forward again.*

Her perspective was repeated by another participant: "*Physical therapy helped me focus on muscles and strength-building, but the lateral movement we do is really good and I know I got to think about that more when I'm moving around, even with my walker."* Other comments that exemplify greater awareness include:

> *This class reinforces what I already knew but I didn't think enough about. I feel more aware of what we've got to do to be healthy. It's good to be reminded about being active and this class helped me do that.*
>
> *I didn't know about warm-ups and now I just can't do something without preparing first. At my age, I can get hurt if I don't go slow and take my time. And before doing anything rough, I got to work into it first.*

For one person, JDE was more than just being aware of physical activity, but a reminder that laughter and having fun contribute to health, "C*oming here keeps me thinking how important it is to stay active and to laugh and have fun."*

## Individually-Tailored Engagement

A central feature of action research is to work in collaboration *with* stakeholders, not impose one-way directives *on* them. In designing the first round of activities, we recognised the need to serve a wide range of individual needs and interests. To achieve this goal, the JDE instructor closely monitored the older adults during preliminary activities and adjusted the pace so nobody would be left out. To compensate for different skill levels, those who were physically capable were encouraged to add their own steps to make the activity more challenging, and those who were less capable were encouraged to make appropriate adjustments. This phase of programme development required considerable repeating of activities and feedback from participants. Most saw this as a benefit, but a married couple in their mid-sixties who described their health as excellent expressed disappointment with this approach, as the husband expressed: *"It moved too slowly and there's not enough action."* In support of the individualized pace of the programmes, others disagreed with the couple:

> *You two are young and in good health, and you do lots of dancing. But me, I'm older and can't move any faster. The pace is really good for me.*

*If I wanted it faster, I just added another spin in the middle of it or whatever to make it interesting and still keep pace with everyone, and I don't want it to get harder if other people can't do it. I like just the way it is.*

*I like the way it is too. Even if the steps are easy to do, there's plenty of variety to keep it fun.*

*The activities are really fine the way they are. They're enough and at the end of the day, I'm not ready to do more.*

*I can't do all this anymore like you, you know... …I like the pace and the challenge.*

Although many of the activities were highly structured and were preceded with instructions, some required improvisation. Accordingly, participants were encouraged to explore ways to incorporate props (balls, hoops, etc.) in the activities, guided by their own imagination and without explicit instructions. The goal of these activities was to stimulate independent creativity, generate novel motor patterns, require social negotiation to accomplish tasks, memorize steps, calculate timing, and synchronise movements with improvised (familiar and unfamiliar) music. The participants expressed a variety of responses in favor of a flexible format.

*I liked that we could add our own thing and not just follow the same pattern all the time. And, it was fun to see what other people were adding.*

*I always love dancing so I enjoyed being able to jump in and swing more without stopping.*

*I'm usually more comfortable with structure, but this was fun. And nobody was judgmental. We all laughed and just went with the flow. We did our own thing, but did it together. It was fun.*

## Challenges Associated with the Programme

Challenges that were identified in the first focus group session, reflecting the first year of programme implementation, included transportation, scheduling, and differences in skill levels among participants. Getting to and from the San Marcos Senior Activity Center was a challenge for some participants during the first semester of the programme because many did not drive, as described by one person, "*One of the problems is how do you get here if you don't drive. That' is a big, big process."* Although the city offered free van service to the Center for those going there for lunch, scheduling pick-up and drop-off service required reservations, advanced planning and paying for lunch. At least several individuals found this too challenging, as one person stated, "*The van is free, but it's for those who come here for lunch too. The meals are okay, but that's not what interests me here."* Some participants relied on a family member or friend for transportation, individuals who had their own scheduling constraints: *"Getting around is complicated. Sometimes I get a ride from my neighbour who's retired and she comes back for me later. But, she can't always do it."* For two of the participants, attending a class consumed a major part of the day's schedule, including dressing for a public event and arranging transportation.

*It takes a while to get dressed, fix my hair, and so on because I still have my vanity. I don't just get up and go. It takes a lot of planning.*

*It still takes work to get here on time and by the time I get back, half the day's gone by. So I have to plan ahead and sometimes my plans don't work out because I have to rely on other people to get around.*

By the third semester, the transportation problem was resolved for the existing participants with ride-sharing and better planning with drivers. As one person put it: *"Most of us worked out ride-sharing and got better routines for getting here."* Another challenge, as described earlier by the married couple, was that the programme was not challenging enough for them. They dropped from the programme after two sessions and described their concerns this way:

*I think this would be a better if the dancing moved along more quickly and didn't slow down so much. And maybe Shoko could have added another ball [props to add complexity]. It could have been fun if she brought in two or three balls, not just one. And, all the things she did, I would like to see a little added progression to it.*

*Yeah, I want more dancing... …add more difficulty to get our hearts pumping. Sometimes it feels like we're just warming up.*

The rest of the participants disagreed, saying they appreciated the individualised approach. For example, one of the least mobile participants thought some of the activities were too challenging, but appreciated the pace:

*Some of the things we were participating in was challenging. Walking backwards would be "no way," even walking sideways because of the balance thing. Real hard for me to get to that point where I don't have the anxiety of not having my walker to hold on to. Shoko would have us do something then speed it up. That challenged me. But, it isn't a problem because everyone is understanding and there's no judgment. The pace is okay, but challenges me and I suppose that's good.*

## Recommendations for Making Improvements

The first-year focus group participants offered recommendations that related to improving public transportation options, such as *"get the bus to have more runs to give us more options… …and less stops" and "ask the bus people to make the system more focused on what's happening here at the Senior Center,"* yet these were ideas outside our authority. A ride-sharing system was eventually implemented to assist everyone during the third semester, so the transportation problem was resolved.

Another recommendation that was posed by one person was to have more classes throughout the week: *"If there were more classes, then there would be more opportunities to just drop-in on days when I don't have other things going on or when I'm feeling like I need it.*" Having more classes was not a workable option for the JDE instructor or other programme affiliates due to time constraints, plus the Center would not allocate more days for using the

large room. When pressed for more recommendations on how to improve the programme, a common recommendation was to continue the current practices:

> *I love it. Just keep doing what you're doing. The kids (students) are amazing and so caring. They're great, and Shoko (instructor) is great too, and it all comes together.*
>
> *Don't change a thing. I like how it's working now. I can't think of how it could be better. If anything, you should publicize this more so other folks could benefit from it too.*

Several participants recommended expanding the programme so more people could benefit from it:

> *So many could benefit from a programme like this. Promote it more so more people will hear about it. Put a notice in the free papers, for example… … People will come if they know about it.*
>
> *Don't bother to promote this class as strength building because there's lots of other classes like that. What's different about this class is: balance and memory. Don't spread yourself out too much. Just promote balance and memory and many people will be interested in that."*

In launching the programme, promotional materials were placed in local papers and posted at local venues, but enrollment was still a challenge. Over the next year, two student interns will be responsible to promoting the programme with Meals on Wheels, several physical therapy clinics, and local assisted living communities.

A final recommendation was associated with the $23 cost for participating in the programme. Most participants preferred no cost, one preferred a token cost, and everyone recommended getting outside funding to offset costs. If the cost were waived, older adults who are less financially secure could afford to attend. The cost was shared with San Marcos Senior Activity Center to account for expenses (reception, scheduling, etc.). At the time of this study, the programme was self-funded, but over the next phase of the programme, external funding will be sought to offset the participation cost.

## Discussion and Implications

Designed as action research, the main goal of this pilot study was to plan, implement and evaluate an exercise programme for older adults in the community and seek ways to make improvements. To that end, we designed and delivered a programme that was shown from prior studies to be effective with European clients (Hars et al. 2014b; Trombetti et al. 2011). Our goal was to adopt and pilot a programme that has been ongoing in Geneva, Switzerland for over 40 years and introduced in the U.S. by Lisa Parker, then invite participants to engage with us in action research to tailor it to the needs of nonclinical community-based older adults. Feedback from the participants was applied through each session so refinements could be made, and what was learned from the focus group feedback will be applied in the next phase for making ongoing programme improvements.

A primary theme throughout the focus group interviews was the social value of the programme, including the formation of friendships with the other older adults and the stu-

dents who were at the Center for lab experience. Participants spoke at length, about the pleasure of working with the students and having fun with each other. While we expected friendships to be developed, we did not expect the health benefits of JDE to be discussed as a secondary topic. This finding about friendships fits the numerous sociological studies summarised by Umberson & Montez (2010) about the value of social relationships and its connection with health and wellbeing. Positive relationships are known to be beneficial for mental and physical health and this might partly explain why participants oriented to "friendships" and "fun" as the most important aspect of the programme. In the second year, eight participants who attended regularly repeatedly described themselves as newly established friends, and had long impromptu social periods before and after each JDE class to reinforce those friendships. Words such as "fun" and "social" were frequently used to describe their interaction and laughter was a prominent expression throughout the feedback sessions. JDE is unique in that it requires participants to interact with each other in multiple ways (talking, moving around each other, holding hands, switching partners, negotiating space, interacting in unexpected ways, etc.), adding to the intimacy. Laughter was also described as an ongoing dynamic, both reported and observed throughout the programme, contributing to the retention of the remaining eight participants, according to their own accounts. As research has shown, laughter has potential for improving health (Bennett & Lengache 2008; Martin 2001) and is an integral part of building relationships (Kurtz & Algoe 2015). Like the Hars et al. (2014b) study, enjoyment was a primary motivational factor for long-term participation in this programme. Because enjoyment is positively correlated with cognitive functioning as Theone and her colleagues found (2016), we assume JDE had a cognitive benefit for the participants in this study as confirmed by their own accounts.

Many of the participants described the programme as the most important social activity in their weekly routines. As one person put it, *"This is the most fun I have all week and I look forward to coming."* While none of the participants actually said they experienced loneliness, this kind of statement and the earlier comments about the social aspects of the programme suggest that the programme was an important antidote to loneliness and social isolation. Studies have shown that between 20-40% of older adults report moderate to severe loneliness (Newall et al. 2009; Pinquart & Sorensen 2001; Weeks 1994; Wenger & Burholt 2004), and social isolation rates could be as high as 20% for older community-dwelling adults (Lubben et al. 2006). Research by Donovan et al. (2017) has also shown that loneliness is associated with accelerated cognitive decline. Thus, even if this programme may not have actually improved cognitive functioning, it has implications for delaying it.

Unlike physical therapy treatments where strength-building is a main focus and is not interactive with other patients, JDE provides physical and cognitive benefits in a social setting that encourages creative expression, games, and physical interaction with others. Several participants in our study described physical therapy as boring and repetitive, but in contrast, they described JDE as being fun, socially engaging, friendly and mutually supportive. JDE is distinct because it incorporates cognitive tasks in the activities, not just physical therapy – a combined focus on mind and body. Other therapy programmes could potentially be more effective by adding socially interactive dynamics in the design and using action research to refine the activities.

Another goal associated with this study was to provide a laboratory setting for kinesiology students so they could learn how to assess physical mobility and gain experience in promoting fall prevention and injury recovery. Though they initially required considerable guidance, most quickly understood the basic concepts of JDE and actively contributed to refining the techniques. They made numerous suggestions for improving practice (e.g., tips for using a gait belt, strategies for building teamwork and making activities more fun, and guidelines for conducting safe and dignified physical/cognitive testing) and these will be presented in a follow-up article. At the onset of the present study we recognised the value of intergenerational engagement based on what research has shown (Skropeta et al. 2014), and the older adults repeatedly reported appreciation for "the kids." The fact that the students were mentioned as the first positive aspect of the programme, in response to the first open-ended question, reinforces the value of intergenerational interaction for programmes that serve older adults.

All the older adults in the programme reported improved mobility, balance and health as a result of participating in the programme. This finding is consistent with the earlier JDE studies by Hars et al. (2014b), however, the outcome of our pre-post measures were not statistically reliable (not presented) due to so few participants in the study and the inherent daily variability in function in older adults. In preparation for the next phase of research, the researchers will consult with the researchers from the Hars et al. (2014b) study for guidance on the testing approaches they used, and with more participants in the programme, we expect reliable data for making statistical comparisons.

Several participants claimed that JDE was more effective than conventional physical therapy or gym activities because it provided more *"real world"* movementand not repetitive exercise. We could not confirm any comparative benefits because we did not have comparison measures from other therapy programmes or a controlled group. Attrition and infrequent participation also made it impossible to have a significant number of participants to provide measurement data. With an expected increase in the number of participants in the next research phase, pre- and post-measures of physical mobility we will collect to determine physical changes in balance, task completion speed, frequency of repetition, and kinesthetic mobility.

Another benefit reported by participants was improved cognitive functioning and greater confidence in mobility, reflecting similar findings as the Hars et al. (2014a) JDE study. Without quantifiable evidence, however, actual progress in cognitive abilities was inconclusive in this study. For the next action research phase, the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (Nasreddine et al. 2005) will be applied as pre- and post-measures to assess several areas of cognitive functioning: memory recall, visuospacial abilities, phonemic fluency, two-item verbal abstraction, serial subtraction, trail-making. We expect to have enough observations in our data set to make a statistically reliable assessment over the next phase of research.

Because participants in this study were self-selected volunteers, the sample was not representative of the general population of adults aged 65 or older, and they were not all at elevated risk for falls as in the Hars et al. (2014a) study. All participants in this study were between the ages of 68 to 94, lived independently in their own home, and had not experienced a fall in the last two years. The next phase of this programme should include a broader sample of participants, and this was one of the recommendations made by participants in the second focus group. This recommendation reinforces the notion that different skill levels was not a concern for the participants, and testimonies about engaging at one's own comfort level also

supported this conclusion. During the first year of the programme, a married couple expressed concerned about the relative ease of the programme meand said they expected "*more lively dancing*." While they tailored their own participation with more vigour, the programme was not a good fit for their high level of mobility, so they dropped out from the programme. This mismatch was likely the result of our promoting the programme as "Brain and Body Fitness through Music and Movement" to highlight a positive message, rather than focus on falls or adverse outcomes, following recommendations by York et al. (2011). Students are now responsible for developing promotional materials with collaborative input, so we anticipate a more targeted recruitment outcome. Although the format encouraged participants to engage at their own comfort level, the programme is probably not appropriate for individuals who are physically active, in excellent health and expect continuous vigorous activities.

One challenge in recruiting older adults for this study involved getting their signature for a release of liability and for informed consent. While the language was kept to a simple format, potential participants left immediately after learning about the required signatures. And while all the participants who continued in the programme signed both forms, some refused to participate in pre- and post-measures of their physical and cognitive abilities. Following research ethics, participation in measurement testing was voluntary and not required for participating in the programme.

About 25% the participants dropped from the programme during the first semester, as described earlier, fitting similar dropout rates from other community-based programmes (Nyman & Victor 2012; Picorelli et al. 2014). Those who persisted but dropped after the second semester gave several reasons: wanting more challenging activities, severe health problems (e.g., terminal cancer, heart disease, dementia), scheduling problems, or transportation problems. Of those who persisted during the third semester, about half attended classes irregularly because of a health-related issue, such as not feeling well that day, having a problem with scheduling (e.g., medical appointment or competing event), or not having convenient transportation that day. While we were not able to resolve some of the issues, the transportation problem was addressed with free or public transportation options and ride-sharing. Perhaps retention would have been higher had we addressed transportation problems earlier in the programme.

The findings from this study added a qualitative layer of a collaborative understanding on what was beneficial and what was challenging in this pilot programme, plus it provided a setting for applying valuable recommendations for making improvements. More research is needed to understand how physical activities might offset the degenerative process of aging and improve health after an injury, and what kinds of activities are best for this purpose. The outcome of this action research serves as an important preliminary step for a larger study on JDE, and qualitative findings suggests the programme was effective for improving physical and mental functioning for older adults living in the community. It is a promising strategy for delaying decline in age-related mobility, preventing falls and enhancing recovery after a fall. The programme should be made widely available so the growing number of older adults can benefit from music-based multitask activities that are supported by social relationships. The programme would be especially valuable in residential care environments where older adults have physical mobility problems and fewer transportation options. Preventing falls will reduce unnecessary suffering, and reduce one of the greatest healthcare expenditures associated with older adults.

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# Appendix A: Historical Steps in Developing Dalcroze Eurhythmics

| FIRST SEMESTER | |
|---|---|
| **Activity** | **Summary of Activity Details** |
| Identified the Scope of the Program | Goal: Adapt Dalcroze Eurhythmics, a music-and-movement educational program with high efficacy for fall prevention as a community fall prevention program to North American older adults Audience. Develop an intergenerational program through involving [CSUSM] university students outreach to the community older adults.<br>Develop dialogue among several parties: San Marcos Senior Activity Center and the City of San Marcos; Kinesiology and Human Development Departments and the School of Nursing at California State University San Marcos; Health and Human Services Aging and Independence Services at County of San Diego |
| Gathered Preliminary Information | Explored answers to these questions:<br>• Human and material resources?<br>• How to recruit older adult participants?<br>• How to tailor Dalcroze music to fit physical and cognitive exercises?<br>• How to prepare Kinesiology students and engage them in activities? |
| Reviewed Related Literature | • Swiss studies of Dalcroze Eurhythmics as a community intervention<br>• Explore physical therapy and common U.S. fall prevention community programs for best practices |
| Developed an Initial Research Plan | Multipart plan included: publicity and recruitment; meeting venue, schedule and equipment; design of activities and instructions; training for Kinesiology students and developing their feedback system; engaging older adults in activities and feedback system; record-keeping and data collection. |
| Revised Planning and Data Collection | • Engaged older adults in planned Dalcroze Eurhythmics activities<br>• Designed and implemented new activities and/or modified current ones with input from older adults and students<br>• Implemented improvised activities driven by each participant<br>• Collected data: observation, feedback after each activity, participatory dialogue, attendance records, physiometrics (balance, speed, frequency of repetition, kinesthetic mobility), Montreal Cognitive Assessment (memory recall, visuospatial abilities, phonemic fluency, two-item verbal abstraction, serial subtraction, trail-making), follow-up focus group discussions with older adults and students, and students' course evaluations. |
| Analyzed the Data | • Qualitative data from older adults and students: strengths of the program, challenges of the program, and participants' recommendations for making improvements.<br>• Quantitative data for baseline indicators of health: physical measures, and psychometric measures<br>• Member-checking and interjudge reliability assessment |
| SECOND SEMESTER | |
| **Activity** | **Summary of Activity Details** |
| Refined Plan for Next Action Research Phase | Used feedback to guide publicity and recruitment, therapy activities, training for Kinesiology students, feedback systems, and data collection methods. |
| Shared Results | Summarized main findings with stakeholders |
| Reflected on Process | Critically discussed the program with researchers, older adults and students. |

# Appendix A (cont'd): Historical Steps in Developing Dalcroze Eurhythmics

| SECOND SEMESTER | |
|---|---|
| **Activity** | **Summary of Activity Details** |
| Continued Implementation and Data Collection | • Engaged older adults in Dalcroze Eurhythmics<br>• Refined instructions for each activity<br>• Older adults and students designed new activities and/or modified current ones<br>• Participants developed new improvisational activities<br>• Continued the feedback systems for each activity from older adults and students<br>• Collected more data: observation, participatory dialogue, attendance records, physiometrics, Montreal Cognitive Assessment, focus groups with older adults and students, and students' course evaluations. |
| Analyzed the Data | Qualitative data:<br>• Strengths of the program<br>• Challenges of the program<br>• Participants' recommendations for making improvements<br>• Quantitative data for baseline indicators of health:<br>• physical measures<br>• psycho-metric measures<br>• Member-checking and interjudge reliability assessment |
| Shared and Communicated the Results | Summarize main findings with stakeholders, and shared findings at the International Conference for Music Perception and Cognition. This was also feedback process for refining the program. |
| Reflected on the Process | Critically discussed the program with researchers, older adults and students. |
| THIRD SEMESTER | |
| **Activity** | **Summary of Activity Details** |
| Refined Plan for the Next Action Research Phase | Used feedback to guide publicity and recruitment, therapy activities, training for Kinesiology students, feedback systems, and data collection methods. |
| Shared Results | Summarized main findings with stakeholders; presented at GSA Conference |
| Reflected on Process | Critically discussed the program with researchers, older adults and students. |
| Continued Implementation and Data Collection | • Engaged older adults in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, refined instructions for each activity as needed, older adults and students designed new activities and/or modified current ones, participants developed new activities, continued the feedback systems from stakeholders,<br>• Collected more data: observation, participatory dialogue, attendance records, physiometrics, Montreal Cognitive Assessment, focus groups with older adults and students, and students' course evaluations. |
| Analyzed the Data | Qualitative data:<br>• Strengths of the program<br>• Challenges of the program<br>• Participants' recommendations for making improvements<br>• Quantitative data for baseline indicators of health:<br>• physical measures<br>• psycho-metric measures<br>• Member-checking and interjudge reliability assessment |
| Shared and Communicated the Results | Summarize main findings with stakeholders, and drafted journal article for Innovation on Aging. This was also a feedback process for refining the program. |
| Reflected on Process | Critically discussed the program among researchers, older adults and students. |

## About the authors

*Rodney Beaulieu* earned a PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and is an assistant professor in the Human Development Department in the College of Education, Health and Human Services at California State University, San Marcos. His research interests include health disparities, American Indian education, microaggression, community engagement, and applying action research to improve human services.

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