INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACTION RESEARCH

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Action Research on the Edge

Miren Larrea

I write this editorial after sharing three intense days in the IJAR 2022 symposium, organised by Sabanci University on the 12th, 13th and 14th of October. My sincere gratitude to Oğuz Babüroğlu and Pinar Akpinar for the organisation of the event and for taking care of every detail while it was ongoing.

Our colleagues in Istanbul challenged participants in the symposium to reflect on "Action Research on the Edge" and we were able to discuss, among others, edges regarding climate change and sustainability, democracy, inclusion and exclusion, anti-gender mobilisations, knowledge democracies and decolonisation. Many of the cases had to do with city or regional development, but we also got to discuss international relationships.

In the opening speech I shared three edges that IJAR has addressed that I consider relevant for the future of the journal: new forms of capitalism and their impact on climate and sustainability, the stagnation of global democratisation and dehumanisation. I share here the contributions that inspired me.

The first is a recent IJAR article (Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck, 2021) that I had the pleasure to co-author with Werner Fricke, Davydd Greenwood and Danilo Streck. Writing with them helped me better understand the tradition of this journal and its future potential. That is why I shared it in the symposium. The article addresses capitalism, and especially its uncontrolled, disembedded forms, as the main force that is changing the world and pushing it closer to the edges by generating both environmental disaster and unprecedented levels of global and societal inequality. The paper is an invitation to Action Researchers to find new formulas to face these emerging forms of capitalism.

Democracy is another relevant concept to understand the edges. In this case I went back to Björn Gustavsen's paper published in IJAR in 2017 and entitled Action Research and the Promotion of Democracy. Gustavsen argued that a global democratisation process seems to have stagnated, and a kind of post-democratic hybrid emerges in formerly democratic countries. He asks: "Is this development of concern to social research in general and Action Research in particular? If so, what can or should be done?". He invited Action Researchers to positively pursue specific ideas about what constitutes a better world, examine the performance potential of democracy, and even to act in its defence.

My third reflection referred to humanisation as another relevant and complex concept to understand Action Research on the edge. For this reflection I was inspired by Danilo Streck, in the interview published in the previous issue of IJAR. Danilo tells us that Paulo Freire, throughout his life, kept reminding us that humanisation is a possibility that we actualize in history and can never be taken for granted. The risk of dehumanisation is always there, and today we are faced with it at every corner.

I want to invite all readers of IJAR to reflect on these and other edges that we are facing, and to consider this journal as a space where we can share not only our research, but also discussions and book reviews that keep dialogue going on how to improve these situations. In this specific issue we address some of these challenges.

The first article, authored by Sebastian Huber and entitled "The shift from owning to sharing: employing Action Research to facilitate SMEs' business model transformation" is based on the rationale that business-to-business sharing facilitates a more sustainable use of resources, besides saving cost to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Huber frames this rationale in the recent discourse that, looking for more sustainable ways to run businesses, calls for novel business models based on collaboration, co-creation and co-opetition. Here, sharing fits more naturally, challenging traditional views on competition. The problem he addresses is that SMEs seem to find barriers to enter in sharing processes. He argues that Action Research can be used to overcome such barriers and presents an Action Research process developed with Swiss SMEs favourably inclined towards B2B sharing activities. In the paper he describes the process and provides frameworks that can be useful for other cases of transformational nature regarding business management research.

The second article, entitled "The role of Action Research in democratizing governance: the case of Bilbao Next Lab" discusses the connection between Action Research and democratisation, inspired among others by the work of Björn Gustavsen. The author, Joaquín Gregorio Oliva Peirano, is a Chilean researcher who has developed his master thesis in the Basque Country (Spain). There, he has found out that researchers using Action Research for territorial development claim that their research contributes to democratisation, however, they have no frameworks that explain how this happens. Consequently, they do not evaluate in an explicit way whether this happens, nor how it happens. In this context, Oliva proposes a framework to analyse such democratisation processes and uses it to evaluate an Action Research process that was already finished. He does this through interviews with the participants. Although what he shares in the article is an ex-post evaluation by participants, his framework could be used by Action Researchers who want to integrate the democratisation dimension in their facilitation.

The other two articles of this issue focus on educational contexts. One of them emphasises the relevance of making educational processes inclusive, while the other focuses on the need to make them meaningful.

Ariane Janse van Rensburg contributes with the paper entitled "Retrospective Action Research on facilitating equitable learning outcomes in a diverse class". This paper addresses two challenges, one is educational and the other, methodological. Regarding educational processes Janse van Rensburg shares how, in a class of students coming from diverse lived experiences, she found out that students with the same potential were not achieving the same academic outcomes. The questions she poses regarding this challenge are: How should I change my teaching to give all students equitable access to successful academic outcomes? Equally importantly, how could I equip future architects with a broader social understanding that would enable them to be relevant designers in a diverse society? While addressing these questions, the author responds also to a methodological challenge. Her study was retrospective, meaning that she conducted it after the changes in teaching had been completed. A valuable contribution of the paper is how to guarantee the robustness of this type of retrospective studies.

The fourth paper in this issue is authored by Reynaldo O. Cuizon and entitled "Healing assessment trauma: an experience of mutuality in Action Research". Cuizon presents his experience as a teacher, when he realised that the way he assessed his students was traumatic for them and decided to develop an Action Research process to transform his assessment materials. He shares in detail how he proceeded to develop such materials collaboratively with his students, and the results he got. However, he also writes about a result that seems to be unexpected: mutual healing between teacher and students. To explain how mutual healing happened Cuizon shares, on the one hand, quotes by students and, on the other, the results of his self-inquiry process. He thus integrates second person and first-person Action Research. Consequently, the article shares not only a process of technical improvement of assessment materials, but also a deeply humanising experience. It is this last dimension that the author emphasises as a feature that can help improve the international landscape regarding education.

Together with these papers we share an interview with a co-editor of International Journal of Action Research, Malida Mooken. She takes us through a journey from Mauritius to Canada through Scotland. For every step of her journey, she shares lessons learnt about transnational monopoly capitalism, "human" substantive individual and collective freedoms, forms of discrimination/domination and decoloniality, among others. They are all part of her perspective on Action Research.

Finally, we share a review by James Karlsen of the book entitled "Students' Quality Circles – QC Circles Re-engineered for Developing Student Personality" authored by Dinesh P. Chapagain. It is an open access book based on experience and practice to enhance the pro-social personality of students and thus empower them with tools and technology and boost their moral values. It can be inspiring for readers facing similar challenges.

I hope that readers of the International Journal of Action Research will enjoy this issue focused on how Action Research can help develop more democratic processes, sustainable businesses and inclusive and humanising education.

The shift from owning to sharing:
employing action research to facilitate SMEs' business model transformation

Sebastian Huber and Santidhorn Pooripakdee

Abstract: The sharing economy has witnessed tremendous growth in a multitude of industries around the world over the past decade. Access to, and a more sustainable use of, resources, cost saving potential, and a multitude of strategic benefits have been identified as attractive opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in business-to-business (B2B) sharing with some frustration by governments, researchers and practitioners that so little actual B2B sharing can be observed in industry practice. It remains a strategic challenge for SMEs to manage the shift from resource ownership to sharing since that transition requires a permanent change in their business model.

In light of the transformational nature of this qualitative research gap, an Action Research methodology has been developed and implemented in partnership with a selected sample of Swiss SMEs favourably inclined towards B2B sharing activities. While discussing how Action Research might bridge the research gap and develop tangible, empirically grounded management recommendations, this paper also contributes specific Action Research methodology for other cases of transformational nature which present an ever more frequent and common scenario in business management research.

Keywords: Action Research, sharing economy, business-to-business (B2B), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), business model transformation, sustainable development.

El cambio de tener en propiedad a compartir: utilizando la Investigación Acción para facilitar la transformación del modelo de negocio de las PYME

Resumen: La economía colaborativa ha experimentado un enorme crecimiento en multitud de sectores de todo el mundo durante la última década. El acceso a los recursos y su uso más sostenible, el potencial de ahorro de costes y una multitud de beneficios estratégicos se han identificado como oportunidades atractivas para que las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYME) participen en el intercambio entre empresas (B2B). Sin embargo, hay cierta frustración por parte de los gobiernos, los investigadores y los profesionales porque se observa poco intercambio en la práctica de la industria. Sigue siendo un reto estratégico para las PYME cambiar de tener la propiedad de los recursos a compartirlos, ya que esa transición requiere un cambio permanente en su modelo de negocio.

Debido al carácter transformador de esta investigación cualitativa, se ha desarrollado una metodología de investigación-acción, que se ha puesto en práctica en colaboración con una

muestra seleccionada de PYMES suizas favorables a compartir B2B. A la vez que se discute cómo la investigación-acción puede salvar la brecha de conocimiento y desarrollar recomendaciones de gestión tangibles y con base empírica, este artículo también aporta una metodología de investigación-acción específica para otros casos de naturaleza transformacional que empiezan a configurar un escenario cada vez más frecuente y común en la investigación de la gestión empresarial.

Palabras clave: investigación-acción, economía colaborativa, business-to-business (B2B), pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYMES), transformación del modelo de negocio, desarrollo sostenible.

1.   Benefits and obstacles of the B2B sharing economy

Sharing, sometimes referred to as collaborative consumption, mostly appears as a peer-to-peer-based (P2P[1]) activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based, often online services (Decrop et al., 2018; Hamari et al., 2016; Weiber & Lichter, 2019). In the broader context, sharing can be associated to what is described as a civilizational crisis of the early 21st century where scientific and technological discoveries allow for a new relationality by means of re-communalization of social life for individuals and corporate citizens alike (Escobar, 2021; Maffesoli, 2020; Wielecki, 2020). Ownership is substituted by access to resources, while at the same time infrequently used assets are used more frequently, resulting in "shared" use (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). While society and governments face the depletion of planet earth's resources in the post-liberal market society of the 21st century (Foord, 2014), sharing could offer a more sustainable alternative to consumption (Daunorienė et al., 2015; Demary, 2014; Georgi et al., 2019; Hamari et al., 2016).

Relatively few cases of business-to-business (B2B) sharing have been described so far, though specific sharing in some industries takes place already (Eschberger, 2020) with a growing global community of pioneers emerging in the post-COVID era (Radjou, 2021). For more companies to actively participate in B2B sharing, a better understanding is needed on the transformational effort required to shift a company's business model from ownership to sharing (Choi et al., 2014) for which the cyclical nature of Action Research is particularly well suited.

1.1.   Sustainability

A more efficient use of (existing) resources avoids additional, individual ownership creating economic sustainability at companies and the macroeconomic level (Daunorienė et al., 2015; Demary, 2014; Georgi et al., 2019). B2B sharing prevents the purchase of new assets or resources, which systematically avoids overproduction and depletion of resources, improving ecologic sustainability (Acquier et al., 2017). Sharing goods with a significant CO_2 footprint

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1   Peer-to-peer (P2P) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) are often used synonymously in literature ignoring the fact that two companies could also be considered as peers and would thus need to be included in P2P

(e. g. trucks or industrial machinery), particularly contributes positively towards energy efficiency and clean air (Pisaniello, 2018). This even more so since businesses – with a focus on their own profitability – are unlikely to generate compensating overconsumption in other domains, critically observed in C2C sharing (Aptekar, 2015).

1.2. Access to resources

Companies create competitive advantage from the resources they own (Prahalad & Hamel, 1997). Therefore, a key driver for B2B sharing is for participating companies to get access to resources they could not afford to own, because they use them only infrequently (Eschberger, 2020). In a number of industries, vertical integration is reducing and companies tend to specialize on their core competencies (Langlois, 2001), thus, the opportunity for sharing as a means of access to resources outside of a company's core competence is growing. The higher the investment and operational cost of a resource, the more likely companies are willing to share it (Grondys, 2019; Vătămănescu & Alexandru, 2018). Which specific resources companies are likely to share, remains confined to patchy evidence of select cases to date (Choi et al., 2014) or a wide definition taken from C2C Sharing: "*high price, low availability, short period of use compared to the durability of products, and low frequency of use*" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 111).

1.3. Business models

While large organizations own more of the crucial resources for conducting their business, it is their size alongside leverage, tax position, growth, cash flow coverage and ownership concentration which determines what assets to lease or rent, and which to own (Ezzell & Vora, 2001). Contrarily, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs[2]) benefit from B2B sharing which provides them with access to resources they could otherwise not afford (Soltysova & Modrak, 2020). SMEs especially in asset-intensive industries are more likely to share resources (Vătămănescu & Alexandru, 2018) with fixed assets as a share of total assets positively correlated towards sharing (Grondys, 2019). Sharing adds to the competitiveness of SMEs like other forms of cooperation which are well established and researched (Choi et al., 2014).

At the heart of market economics, competitiveness is created by rivalry, innovation and differentiation (Steininger et al., 2011). Businesses are typically built on competitive advantages and benefit most if they outplay their rivals (Porter, 1997). Sharing resources with other businesses therefore does not come naturally to companies and is rarely built into business models (Choi et al., 2014; Daunorienè et al., 2015). The willingness to share a resource and subsequently adapt one's business model varies, because each business model is unique and sharing a particular resource may impact a business model at varying degrees (Choi et al., 2014; Soltysova & Modrak, 2020). From the perspective of the business owning an underutilized asset, sharing that asset offers the potential of additional income or contributing margins from an otherwise idle resource (Choi et al., 2014; Radjou, 2021); specif-

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2   The term Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME) will be used along the OECD (2019) definition of companies with between 10 and 250 employees, those above being classified as "large" and below as "micro" enterprises

ically for SMEs their focus is on added value through cost optimisation and the development of a joint network of like-minded SMEs (Niederhauser et al., 2022). Also, a range of success factors were identified for SMEs participating in B2B sharing, such as the contribution to business value, the relationship with sharing partners and the process of the sharing transaction (Huber et al., 2022).

Much academic interest has been directed at understanding the dynamics of sharing between consumers and the resulting business opportunities and business models, their impact on existing markets and ecosystems with digital platform operators particularly in focus (Soltysova & Modrak, 2020). Current research on unsuccessful B2B sharing platforms indicates that a mere transfer of digital, platform-based business models from intermediaries of C2C sharing concepts does not respond sufficiently to operational needs of sharing between companies (Esselin & Falkenberg, 2019; Friederici et al., 2020; Laczko et al., 2019). Therefore, the focus on business model transformation remains with the participating SMEs and does not concern itself with a potential business model or value proposition of a platform or other intermediary between companies (Huber et al., 2022).

1.4. The shift from owning to sharing

In search for more sustainable alternative ways of running businesses, recent discourse calls for novel business models based on collaboration, co-creation and co-opetition for competitive advantage (Cho et al., 2013; Ritala et al., 2014) where sharing fits more naturally, challenging traditional views on competition. While consumers in the C2C sharing economy often participate opportunistically (Bratianu, 2018; Pisaniello, 2018), companies must engage in a more strategic change since the shift from owning to sharing might change causalities within their business logic, e.g. resource use, cost, revenue streams, partnerships, activities, even customer relationships (cf. Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). While the object of sharing (resources being offered or used), type of sharing model (co-ownership, reciprocal use, role of intermediary / platform) and subsequent impact on a participating company's business model will likely vary, there is always a transition effort and managerial action required to enable the shift from owning to sharing (Antikainen et al., 2018). Sharing in itself is specific (unlike networked business models) and affects specific resources and markets, thus it impacts business models in various aspects and degrees (Huber et al., 2022; Perren & Kozinets, 2018).

2. Employing Action Research to understand the shift from owning to sharing

Some knowledge exists on the potential benefits and motivations for companies and especially SMEs to share resources with one another, however, there is a lack of knowledge on how these companies manage the shift from owning assets to sharing them. There is a need for a shift in companies' business model, but the transitional effort and transformation process that lead an organisation from resource ownership to resource sharing remain unclear (Antikainen et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2014).

2.1.   Action Research and SMEs

With only few observable cases of B2B sharing available from practice, qualitative research is needed to understand the required change and transformation of organizations (Dick, 2000) for which Action Research is particularly well suited as it combines activities "in action" with research by acting in the field while generating new knowledge or theory about these actions (Eden & Ackermann, 2018). Due to its collaborative nature close to application and practice, Action Research has been well received by the SME community for topics often focused on the transformational nature of management actions such as innovation and knowledge management, organisational learning or process optimisation (Bhat et al., 2020; Doppio et al., 2021).

In Action Research, transformation and change happen simultaneously with researching and understanding it by applying a cyclical process in sequences of activities and critical reflection, which allows particularly well to accompany the evolution of a novel concept (Jüttner, Huber, Furrer, et al., 2019), such as the emergence of management actions required to shift a business model from ownership to sharing. Later cycles refine methods, data and interpretation of earlier cycles, creating a spiralling, iterative process where the depth of understanding on a subject matter subsequently increases (Dick, 2000). Given the iterative nature of sharing transactions leading to a transformation of the business model, the cyclical yet structured method of Action Research suits these objectives. The participative character where both the researcher and data providers from the object of research are contributing to the process of generating new knowledge is particularly suitable in a case where first-hand insights along the transformation process in the shift from owning to sharing shall be collected.

Using Action Research to understand the transition from a business model based on ownership to a new business model that embraces sharing, the following conceptual research framework was designed (Figure 1): a company participating to the research is portrayed by means of its business model using Business Model Canvas (BMC, Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). In a cooperative effort between researcher and the company, its business model is described twice, (1) before engaging in any sharing transaction (on the left) and (2) after its transition though a series of sharing transactions (right). As the company engages in sharing transactions, a full participatory Action Research cycle (plan, act, observe, reflect) is completed for each transaction. This corresponds to the gradual, iterative transformation of the business model in B2B sharing (Cho et al., 2013). The cycles of Action Research focus on the activities of management in the three domains of systems, organisation, and human beings. From one cycle to the next, the understanding in theory and practice about managerial action required to enable the shift from owning to sharing improves. Both the researcher and manager participate and contribute to the company sequentially transitioning from a state of resources ownership to a state of enabled sharing. After several sharing transactions and their Action Research cycles, the business model of the company is revisited to identify in dialogue with the manager which changes, if any, occurred in the transition from ownership to sharing.

Figure 1: conceptual research framework (own illustration)
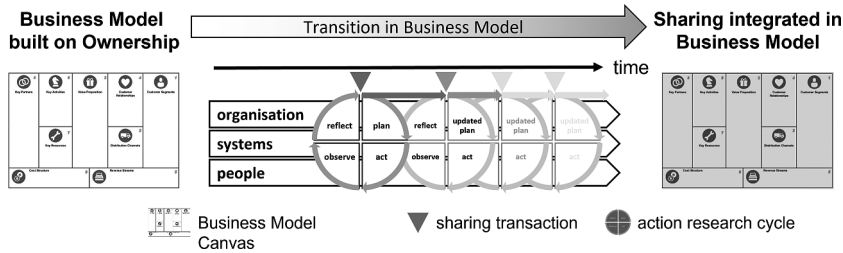
2.2.   Business model analysis

Business Model Canvas (BMC, Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) has received widespread acclaim to allow a succinct description and analysis of a company's "*content, structure, and governance of transactions designed so as to create value through the exploitation of business opportunities*" (Amit & Zott, 2001, p. 493). For each company participating in the shift from owning to sharing, the BMC was collaboratively documented prior to its first sharing transaction using two steps for data collection and analysis along BMC's nine building blocks:

1. Using publicly available sources (website, trade registry entries, media reports, etc.) as well as internal documents (financial reports, strategy papers, etc.) within a maximum of a two-year record, a first draft of the BMC was completed by the researcher;
2. During a 1-hour interactive workshop with a senior company representative, the draft BMC was validated, completed, and detailed further.

After sharing had become an integral and recurring part in their business activity, the formerly confirmed BMC was revisited in another interaction with the industry partner to identify areas of change, where the business model evolved because of the company's participation in sharing transactions. This identified (a) which of the nine BMC building blocks were affected, (b) what specifically changed in each of the affected blocks and (c) how significant that transformation was for the business model overall.

The business model analysis in itself completes one overarching cycle of Action Research, namely (1) the planning step in which the business model is described from sources and discussed with the industry partner, (2) the action of engaging in a series of sharing transactions, (3) the observation of what elements within the business model have changed and (4) the reflection on how these changes might benefit other companies for their shift from owning to sharing.

2.3.   Industry case studies

With only limited cases of B2B sharing available in practice, a B2B sharing research initiative was established in partnership with a set of Swiss industrial SMEs that have prequalified with an interest in initiating, accelerating or expanding their B2B sharing activities (Jüttner, Huber, & Wäfler, 2019). The subjects of the research process about the shift from owning to sharing were twofold (cf. Figure 2): (1) sharing projects evolved from prototype status to im-

plementation through repeat sharing transactions. Within each of those sharing projects, (2) two or more SMEs engaged in sharing activities – and by doing so – transformed their own business model from ownership to sharing of resources.

Figure 2: sharing projects and participating SMEs (own illustration)
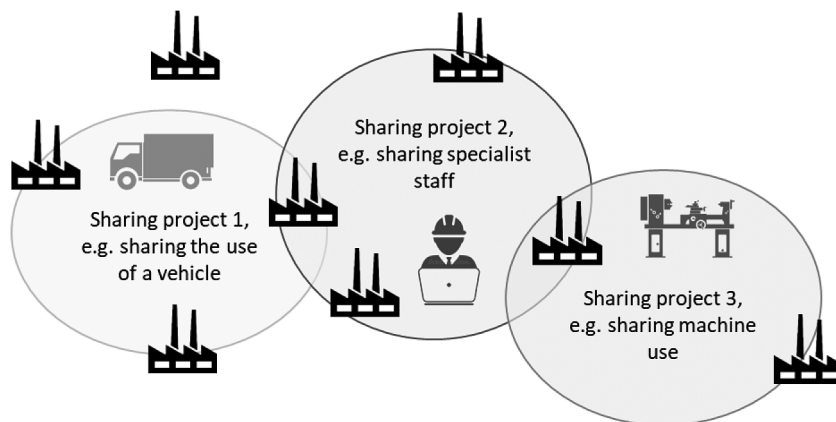
The research initiative's setup, with actual SMEs and industry experts available and willing to directly test and implement research findings in repeat interactions and partnership with researchers to collect and analyse data while reflecting the findings, further supports the argument for action research. Due to its transformatory nature, this research employed several cycles of Action Research (Dick, 2000) to understand the shift which leads SMEs from ownership to sharing of resources on the level of their business model.

2.4.   Within-case analysis

Collaboratively working with SMEs in Action Research cycles along every sharing transaction within each case, the researchers (1) collected data about managerial action by observing and documenting activities by the company decision makers before a sharing transaction, (2) collaboratively developed management actions with regards to the planned sharing, (3) accompanied the implementation of the actions by observing and documenting managerial action during the sharing transaction and (4) evaluated and reflected upon the impact of managerial action for the sharing transaction in a post-sharing narrative interview. By doing so, each cycle generated new insights and documented input for the next cycle and next sharing transaction. Each sharing transaction generated at least two cycles with (a) the provider and (b) user of the shared resource. During the process focusing on managerial action, cross-case analysis was omitted to allow for more progressive developments between cases and avoid early spill-over from one case to the other which could unnecessarily lead to more homogenous results in this exploratory research.

2.5. Cross-case analysis

For each company case, the sharing transaction and managerial actions were time-stamped to understand their sequence and time-distance in relation to the initiation of a sharing transaction. By counting from day zero when sharing is initiated, each cycle and matching managerial action from each case was tracked and then compared across the other cases and cycles to understand if there are any common patterns in the managerial action and their sequence along the timeline. This cross-case analysis allowed to understand the transformational process, namely if there are common patterns of managerial action along the timeline of a sharing transaction.

2.6. Contributing to Action Research for SMEs

Action Research has been previously used for analysing business model transformation (e.g. Athanasopoulou & De Reuver, 2020) and investigated transformative processes in SMEs (McGrath & O'Toole, 2012; Sundström et al., 2021). Given the case-specific and resource-intensive nature of interactive Action Research, studies are often found to focus on only one SME case (Jüttner, Huber, Furrer, et al., 2019; Kampf et al., 2021; Kocher et al., 2011). The purposive design of this research on business model transformation in SMEs therefore contributes to Action Research for SMEs in two ways: first, it demonstrates how managerial action towards the development of a company's business model can be recorded, evaluated and improved over several cycles of Action Research; secondly, it showcases a method of comparison across several cases of Action Research by (a) using a common business model framework and (b) time-stamping the sequence of actions to reveal common patterns and cause-effect-relationships.

Instead of documenting the results of a transformation (i.e. the before and after state of an research object), Action Research allows us understand action along a transformation due to its dialogical, participatory and iterative nature. To both facilitate and investigate the managerial action required to transform a business from owning to sharing requires such a design. Through direct and iterative interactions between researchers and managers, Action Research allows the researcher to contribute research-based tools, analysis, and reflection to industry practice along the transformation, while the manager at the same time shares insights on the transformation for research and analysis while it happens. This design contributes to research practice by evaluating the suitability and potential benefits of the participatory and dialogical nature of Action Research for understanding transformatory processes in business with a focus on managers in SMEs.

3. Implementation and findings

SMEs from Virtuelle Fabrik, a Swiss mechatronics network (virtuellefabrik, 2022), had temporarily exchanged various resources in previous transactions without using the term "sharing", admitting some frustration on the accidental nature of such transactions and their uncertain economic viability. They hence developed an interest in systematically under-

standing the benefits and challenges for successfully sharing their idle resources. For doing so, Virtuelle Fabrik approached a team of academics which subsequently recruited an interdisciplinary research team in engineering, psychology and business alongside managers and leaders at selected industrial SMEs in Switzerland with a joint interest in developing B2B sharing for their business, which lead to a research initiative on B2B sharing (Jüttner, Huber, & Wäfler, 2019).

From March 2020 to March 2022, the research initiative investigated B2B sharing transactions with a set of ten Swiss SMEs in asset-intensive industries (Table 1). The initiative analysed what preconditions need to be met for companies to share a resource (both in terms of the resource characteristics and conditions for companies to participate) along with a process of how B2B sharing can be transacted repeatedly (Huber et al., 2022).

Table 1: SMEs participating to the B2B Sharing initiative (* members of the virtual factory network), own illustration

Company	Job Title
PEKA Metall AG*	Head of Production
Tschudin + Heid AG	CEO
RERO AG	CEO
Estech Industries AG*	Head of Division
KEBO AG	Head of Production
Contrel AG*	Business Development Engineer
Shiptec AG*	Member of the Executive Board
HEVO AG*	Project Manager
Lastech AG*	President
Virtuelle Fabrik*	President

3.1.   Researcher profile and role

The research team is closely embedded with the SME community at large and the Virtuelle Fabrik specifically, both of whom they have been collaborating with for years in various forms of research, consulting, student assignments and other projects. On topics of business model transformation, the specialist researcher has previously headed his own SME and worked with executives in SMEs of a broad range of industries in his previous professional work experience and academic research, occasionally employing Action Research (Jüttner, Huber, Furrer, et al., 2019). The focus topic of B2B sharing emerged collaboratively from discussions with company executives and was subsequently opened to a growing network of SMEs along the setup and initialisation of the research initiative. This included on-site company visits, virtual and in-person interviews, workshops and other forms of repeat collaboration between the researcher and industry practitioners to enable and facilitate B2B

sharing transactions as a precursor to the focused research on business model transition from ownership to sharing.

3.2. Stakeholder involvement and participation in action research cycles

Representatives from the participating SMEs interacted frequently and democratically with the researcher team. Sharing cases, for example, were jointly explored in co-creative workshops – both in terms of the suitable resources and potential partners. The industry partners took the lead on the selection of resources and outlining conditions for partnerships while the researchers provided a framework for structuring the discussion. Also in analyzing and evaluating sharing transactions, the company executives provided expert insights through narrative interviews which were then processed by the researchers, condensed into hypotheses for validation in dialogue with the practitioners. Recording the exchanges between partnering SMEs before, during and after sharing a resource, researchers selectively intervened to ensure that managerial action remained on focus and was recorded on either side of the two participants to the transaction.

Table 2: sharing transactions in the Shift from Owning to Sharing (own illustration)

Shared Resource	Provider Company	Receiving Company	Case Description
3D Measurement	Tschudin + Heid AG	PEKA Metall AG	For measuring a technical part, Tschudin + Heid shares their 3D measurement device with PEKA several times per month.
Delivery Service	RERO AG	Tschudin + Heid AG	Excess loading capacity on the delivery van of RERO is provided to Tschudin + Heid when needed for delivery of their finished products to customers in close-by areas.
Marketing Expertise	Shiptec AG	Contrel AG	Shiptec temporarily provides its marketing expertise to consult on the digital marketing communication of Contrel.
Personnel	PEKA Metall AG	- (undisclosed)	In times of excess capacity, PEKA provides select members of its production workforce to a partner company where these skills and capacity are needed

Four cases of sharing projects were implemented and each documented in two cycles of Action Research between March and November 2021: marketing expertise, 3D measurement, delivery service and personnel (cf. Table 2). With the exception of one case where the receiving company did not participate in the research, seven transformations from owning to sharing were recorded (two companies for each case).

Since Action Research systematically enforces a constant and cyclical dialog between in-practice action and research (Coghlan & Shani, 2020), the research included data collection from observation, interviews and workshops which were fully and appropriately embedded

into the day-to-day managerial actions of participating companies. Particular attention was given to ensure that the sharing transactions were carefully documented, and the actual sharing was recorded such as it occurred in the real world. This included data-based observation of each sharing transaction followed by a semi-structured interview to reflect the observations and especially evaluate managerial action for each transaction. With the explicit permission of interviewees (Table 1), the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed at verbatim and coded independently in two cycles by two researchers using a coding system built from (a) the nine building blocks of Business Model Canvas, (b) timing of managerial action before, during and after the sharing transaction, (c) the three domains of managerial action (systems, organisation, people), (d) the importance of action at strategic, tactical or operational level and (e) the organisational level of responsibility for sharing.

3.3.   Transformation in SMEs through action research

Along the cycles of Action Research, the companies transformed from an erratic and co-incidental occurrence of sharing transaction in spontaneous partnerships, towards more conscious choices for sharing resources with purposefully selected partners. By exposing their intentions to participate in the B2B sharing community, the SMEs transformed towards a more collaborative and open company culture with a higher trust into new partnerships within a wider network.

The focus on management action along a jointly developed frame of reference guided participating SMEs to identify areas of transformation (a) in nine dimensions of their Business Model Canvas, (b) along the transformation timeline with iterative cycles of Action Research and (c) their people, systems, and organisation. Particularly, the changing role of the manager along the company's shift from owning to sharing was reflected through the dialogue between researchers and practitioners. Not only did managers realise that they need to lead the transformation in their organisation along the shift from owning to sharing in dimensions of people, systems and organisation, they also adapted their own role and managerial action as their company transformed from resource ownership to sharing.

The participatory nature of Action Research ensured that the results, findings, tools and recommendations were jointly owned by the industry practitioners and researchers. While the results provided new findings from a research perspective, they made explicit what the companies had already adopted and implemented along the process – making the transformation visible that had implicitly occurred along the cycles of Action Research.

3.4.   Findings

Out of the nine building blocks of Business Model Canvas, three areas of change were identified across all company cases: value proposition, partnerships and cost structures. The shift from owning to sharing leads companies (1) to rethink and potentially expand their value proposition on the market, (2) to open up their business model to new partnerships and (3) to deliver benefits on their cost structure by either monetising an idle resource (as provider to the sharing transaction) or use a resource from a partner at a lower cost than ownership or market-based rent.

All cases illustrated the need for managerial action on all three domains of (1) systems (predominantly processes, technical infrastructure and IT), (2) organisation and (3) people (investing management time and staff development and training). Actions in all three domains were apparent during the entire process of planning, implementing and evaluating sharing transactions. When the timing of management action was specifically cross-referenced with the three domains, a priority of management action became apparent for each of the phases (cf. Figure 3): *before* a sharing transaction, management activity focused on investing time to identify potential resources for sharing (idle capacity or demand for resources) and select potential partners for sharing. *During* the sharing transaction, the focus was on the design, adaptation and implementation of processes and infrastructure to accommodate the sharing transaction. *After* one or several sharing transactions of the same resource, the focus turned to enable and develop the organisation to embrace sharing more permanently, empowering the teams and staff to actively integrate sharing in their day-to-day routines.

Figure 3: focus of management action along three phases of sharing transactions (own illustration)
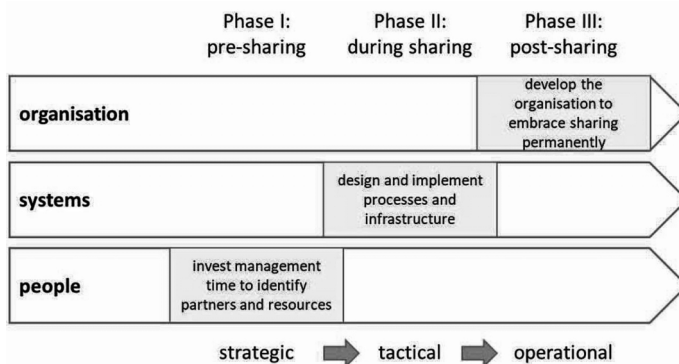
Cross-checking the relevance of sharing, managers also assigned a more strategic importance to the first phase, moving to tactical priority during the sharing itself and handing further sharing transactions of the same resource to an operational level thereafter, correlating with the three phases (cf. Figure 3).

4.   Discussion and further research

This research depends on actual sharing cases taking place between participating SMEs, which remains rare in practice and often cannot be observed in significant frequency without direction. The direct involvement of a researcher in an industry case with an agreed purpose of improving the quality and frequency of B2B sharing underlines the argument for using Action Research. The empirical scope and research methodology, however, are not confined to the set of already confirmed company cases, but can easily be expanded to additional companies. Two sets of Action Research cycles and data records were generated with each sharing transaction (i. e., one for each sharing participant company) which allowed for swift accu-

mulation of empirical data even with a relatively limited set of participants. Further sharing transactions along with additional cycles of Action Research might be required at the same or additional companies still to fully validate the findings.

Along an Action Research project, research goes hand-in-hand with problem solving, which required a stronger emphasis on reflective action or reflexivity in balance of generalisation (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 207–208). For doing so, the contextual conditions of the research project were aptly outlined (Jüttner, Huber, & Wäfler, 2019) along with detailed descriptions of the participating organisations and the key informants along a Business Model Canvas analysis of each SME. The transfer of contextualised knowledge to other settings requires an active process of reflexivity instead of direct generalisation of findings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 208).

Given that transformational issues present an ever more frequent challenge in applied business management research (Frishammar & Parida, 2019; Rahman & Thelen, 2019), the methodology outlined here might find its application in other relevant areas such as digital transformation, service transformation, change management or organisational development. While it continues to be relevant to understand such transformations with regards to their outcome (before / after), i. e. in terms of *what* has changed, an equally attractive question will be to better understand *how* the transformation was achieved. As the role and actions of managers and executives in such transformations are already subject of research (Kumar Basu, 2015; Wrede et al., 2020), they are often investigated and described as static characteristics of a leader's profile or organisational parameters. This Action Research design through its iterative nature could potentially allow us to understand such characteristics as evolving roles and actions along the timeline of a transformation.

With related business research focused on (1) a need for business model transformation, (2) aiming to understand effective managerial action and (3) the interest in a transformation along a timeline, this specific Action Research methodology and its tools might be considered along a series of qualitative case studies in potentially a broad range of similar subject matters. Quite directly, Business Model Canvas might be embedded along an overarching Action Research cycle as a structuring model to identify areas of transformation and change. In working interactively with managers along several iterative cycles of Action Research, their evolving actions and roles along a transformatory process may be documented while facilitating the transformation itself. In so far, Action Research can cooperatively contribute to a transformation in business within a research project while simultaneously documenting its findings for a broader audience. Looking at managerial action in the dimensions of systems, organisations and people equally merits consideration in transformatory processes which might require change at varying degree in these dimensions at different times. Again, the iterative nature of Action Research allows us to record a time dimension for managerial action in the scope of analysis.

The participatory nature of Action Research makes it appropriate for transformations that include participatory elements, either in their process or as a result. B2B sharing being a collaborative activity in comparison with competitive ownership of resources, Action Research has itself facilitated participating SMEs to transform towards a more participating business model for themselves.

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The Role of Action Research in Democratizing Governance:
The Case of Bilbao Next Lab

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze how Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) promotes democratization in governance spaces. Considering the declared democratic intention of action research (AR) (Gustavsen, 2017; Palshaugen, 2014), ARTD is not an exception (Larrea, 2019). However, this specific relation with democratization has not been yet analyzed, nor measured in ARTD. In a context in which the number of countries categorized as *free* is at its lowest level in the 21st century (The Freedom House, 2021), the main contribution of this paper is the construction of a new analytical framework in order to assess the degree of democratization in ARTD processes. This analytical framework can be useful for other approaches to AR as well. More specifically, the most important contribution is the analysis of how ARTD may be facilitating such processes. This investigation studies governance at the Bilbao Next Lab, an AR laboratory focused on urban policy making in the Basque Country, Spain. This process is being facilitated through ARTD by the Basque Institute of Competitiveness – Orkestra in alliance with the local government, the Bilbao City Council and its economic development agency, Bilbao Ekintza. The case shows, together with new democratization dimensions analyzed, a deep and diverse bonding system between ARTD and democratization, in which the democratization factors hold to all ARTD elements. The paper discusses how the core ARTD elements are promoting the development of what are considered in theory as democratization factors.

Key words: Action research, territorial development, democratization, governance, urban policies.

El papel de la Investigación Acción en la democratización de la Gobernanza: el caso de Bilbao Next Lab

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio es analizar cómo la Investigación Acción para el Desarrollo Territorial (IADT) promueve la democratización en espacios de gobernanza. Considerando la declarada vocación democrática de la investigación acción (IA) (Gustavsen, 2017; Palshaugen, 2014), la IADT no es una excepción (Larrea, 2019). Sin embargo, esta relación específica aún no ha sido analizada para el caso de la IADT. En un contexto en donde el número de países denominados como *libres* está en su nivel más bajo del s. XXI (The Freedom House, 2021), la principal contribución de esta investigación es la construcción de un nuevo marco analítico para evaluar el grado de democratización para procesos de IADT. Este nuevo marco analítico puede ser útil a su vez para otros enfoques de IA. Específicamente, el principal aporte es el análisis de cómo la IADT puede estar facilitando la democratización en estos espacios. Este artículo se enfoca en el espacio de gobernanza del Bilbao NextLab, un laboratorio de IA responsable del diseño y gestión de diversas políticas públicas en el País Vasco, España. Este proceso está siendo facilitado por medio de la IADT por el Instituto Vasco

de Competitividad – Orkestra en conjunto con el gobierno local, *Ayuntamiento de Bilbao*, y su agencia de desarrollo económico, *Bilbao Ekintza.* El caso muestra, junto con las nuevas variables de democratización analizadas, un profundo y diverso sistema de relaciones entre la IADT y la democratización, en el que los factores de democratización sostienen a todos los elementos de la IADT. El artículo discute cómo los elementos de la IADT están promoviendo el desarrollo de lo que la teoría define como factores de democratización.

Palabras clave: Investigación acción, desarrollo territorial, democratización, gobernanza, políticas urbanas.

1.   Introduction

Democracy is considered as a fundamental aspect for an inclusive human development (PNUD, 2008). However, due to a number of ecological, technological and health changes in recent years, many countries have questioned the idea of whether democracy is the best available model for facing upcoming world challenges, "turning towards a kind of post-democratic hybrid" (Gustavsen, 2017: 102). The Freedom House Institute, an organization which defines and registers the state of civic and political rights in the world, estimates that during 2020, 75 % of the world's population experienced a deterioration of their democracies. This fact reinforces the downward trend in the number of countries categorized as *free*, and an upward trend in countries considered as *not free*, both at their lowest and highest levels since 2005, respectively.

Table 1.1*:* Evolution of the state of democracies in the world

Category / Year	2005	2010	2015	2020
"Free"	89	87	86	82
"Partially free"	58	60	59	59
"Not free"	45	47	50	54

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from (*The Freedom House*, 2021).

In this context, the need arises to reflect on democracies and how researchers can contribute to their sustainability. Due to the declared democratic intention of action research (Gustavsen, 2017; Palshaugen, 2014), this document focuses on AR as an academic tool for deepening democracy. Specifically, this study analyzes the ARTD approach, which also has "the AR intention of democratizing processes where are applied" (Larrea, 2019: 22).

The case study in this paper is the Bilbao Next Lab project as a case of governance in the Basque Country, Spain. This space is responsible for designing and making decisions affecting diverse public policies, such as the Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy making, the Municipal Policy for Employment and Talent and others, and is facilitated through ARTD by the Basque Institute of Competitiveness – Orkestra in alliance with the

local government, the Bilbao City Council and its economic development agency, Bilbao Ekintza.

Thus, this case study is based on an ARTD process in order to analyze whether this process has had any impact on the democratization of policy processes through the transformation of its governance. This is a new contribution to the literature, as no specific tools, frameworks or dimensions to assess democratization in ARTD have been identified.

Considering this situation, this study proposes a conceptual framework and a case study to respond to a twofold research question: *what dimensions of democratization can be recognized in an AR process,* a question that is addressed based on existing literature, and *how did ARTD promote the democratization of governance in Bilbao Next Lab,* which is answered in connection with the case study.

The main contribution of this paper is a new analytical framework presented in an effort to provide more comprehensive methods of analyzing democratization and to bring this concept closer to AR experiences. In this case, the framework has been used ex-post to examine the impact of an action research process on the democratization of the governance of specific policies. However, it could also be integrated as a future tool for facilitators of AR.

During the research process for this paper, I considered my positionality through the multiple positionality perspective (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 43). On the one hand, this research was made possible thanks to a master's program internship in the Basque Institute of Competitiveness – Orkestra, which allowed me to access the action research team that facilitated the previously mentioned project after project completion. At the same time, this research has been my master's thesis on Participation and Community Development. This master's program was done at the University of the Basque Country, Spain, with no connection to the project. It may likewise be relevant to emphasize that the ideas of democracy, state, public participation and institutions presented in this study are understood through the lens of my experience of being born and growing up in Chile, which can be particularly influenced by the social uprising of 2019. I consider this point as a sign of my outsider role in the research.

2.   Definition of the problem in practice

The Bilbao City Council, its economic development agency Bilbao Ekintza and Orkestra have been working together through the Bilbao Next Lab AR laboratory since 2013. The aim of this space has been to drive urban competitiveness towards sustainable and inclusive wellbeing in the city of Bilbao.

The role of Orkestra has been to facilitate this process through the ARTD approach. In 2018 these dialogues identified a complex scenario of potentially negative consequences of the digitization, automation and integration of new technologies in production processes affecting current and future employment. In order to overcome this challenge, Knowledge Intensive Businesses Services (KIBS) firms were detected as territorial actors that could help solve the problem. However, there was also a need to enhance capabilities and develop talent in this field. Thus, this problem was designated as talent mismatch in KIBS.

One of the first steps in the ARTD process was to define the identity of the core stakeholders in order to address this problem through policymaking, which was the approach that the city council and its agency wanted to address. In the dialogue between policymakers and action researchers, Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS) (Albizu & Estensoro, 2020) were detected as territorial actors that could help solve the problem of employment loss. However, there was a need to enhance capabilities and develop talent in this field in order to play that role. This problem was designated as *talent mismatch in KIBS.* To overcome this problem, another type of territorial actor was considered: vocational education and training (VET) centers. Consequently, participants in the ARTD process were the following: representatives of VET centers, KIBS firms, local and regional policymakers that could promote programs related to this problem and action researchers.

Whereas some of the Bilbao Ekintza (development agency) policymakers and Orkestra action researchers facilitated the workshops, the other participants were involved in the action research process.

This collaborative process started in December 2018 and was still ongoing at the time of writing this paper. Fifteen workshops have been held since the beginning of the process, around five workshops per year on average, with more than 30 people participating in different spaces. The aim of the first stage was to analyze the potential of VET profiles in the KIBS talent mismatch. Due to their relevant contribution, primarily VET centers and KIBS firms were invited to participate. In the following stages, several new policies were co-designed to address the mismatch and prioritizing the technologies to focus the skills development.

The main impact of this process can be explained on two levels. The first level of impact relates to the new policy programs co-designed that emerged from these dialogues. For example, in order to guarantee equal gender accessibility, the Shadowing Project was created, inviting female students to discover the benefits being professionals in KIBS and through other female references at KIBS firms. These programs were being implemented in the last stages considered in this research, which introduced changes in VET policymaking and in the Municipal Policy for Employment and Talent. An eventual effective reduction in the talent mismatch will be assessed in further cohorts. The second level of impact is the multi-stakeholder collaborative network created with a common challenge, defined as *VET-KIBS Bilbao Next Lab governance*, and referred to in this paper simply as *Bilbao Next Lab governance.* This paper focuses on how ARTD, through the development of this governance, democratizes the policymaking process.

This last process-result, the governance space, is at the core of the contribution of the facilitation team, as ARTD considers it to be the vehicle and core space for the transformation process (Larrea, 2019). I connect this space with democratization because following this process through ARTD has made it possible for policymakers to experience the value, and/or to confirm the feasibility of sharing power with a more diverse group of people from the territory. Considering the democratic intention of ARTD mentioned in section 1, as well as the lack of tools in ARTD to reflect on democratization, the facilitation team accepted the proposal of the author of this paper to investigate whether the process had promoted the democratization of policymaking beyond the specific solutions given to the problem.

3.   Democratization in AR literature

The previous section presented the context of the specific AR process where the need for a framework to address democratization emerged. This section examines AR literature on democratization, which is the literature this paper aims to contribute to with a specific framework. Considering that the case was developed through ARTD, the section focuses on literature regarding quality of working life (QWL), industrial democracy and co-generative AR, which influence ARTD and provide a consistent framework for analyzing this practice.

The intention of using AR as a tool for strengthening democracy began in its origins and has remained as a significant purpose at present. In this challenge, different action research communities have had to answer to diverse questions throughout history.

With the aim of developing more participative and democratic research methods, Lewin (1943) proposed in broad terms the advantages of considering the implied stakeholders in the research process in order to generate more meaningful and robust results. The vehicle for this engagement was through dialogue. This framework was one of the foundational seeds for several subsequent movements which argued that AR represents a tool for healthier and more robust democracies. Specifically, this section examines the challenges of the QWL and the industrial democracy movements in their declared intention not only of workplace democracy, but of democracy in general since the 1950 s, first in the UK and Norway, and later in the rest of Scandinavia.

One relevant experience analyzed is the QWL movement, which originated from the idea of promoting the notion of autonomy at work, when faced with the question of what AR should do beyond promoting democracy in a context of global democratic precariousness (Gustavsen, 2017). "A core characteristic of the QWL movement was that it offered alternative experiences: people formerly existing in non-democratic contexts could experience democratic life and, through this, develop a deeper commitment to democracy" (Gustavsen, 2017: 109).

Another experience is the subsequent industrial democracy movement and its Scandinavian approach defined as "Action Research for Democracy" (Palshaugen, 2014). Understanding the potential contributions of AR for deepening democracy, the movement was essential to improving AR's legitimacy both in society and in the academic community. The main argument was related to the implication of AR programs within public institutions as part of the democratic system, and considered knowledge arising from such research as public goods.

From these ideas emerged new scientific ways of "providing models of democratic procedures for forming the organization by the members of the organization themselves" (Palshaugen, 2014: 104), promoting democratization as a question of expanding the possibilities for people at work to participate in the processes of development and as question of enforcing more democratic ways of dealing with controversial issues with crossed interests. This action research strategy was later first defined as *democratic dialogue* in Gustavsen (1992).

From these concepts, Greenwood & Levin (2007) built the cogenerative model, which was later adapted in Karlsen & Larrea (2015) which considered contexts with an active participation of policymakers in the dialogue processes with other territorial stakeholders,

defined as ARTD. Perhaps due to these origins, ARTD also has "the AR intention of democratizing processes where are applied" (Larrea, 2019: 22).

Thus, it could be said that both the QWL and the Action Research for Democracy movements and their evolution have had several aspects in common. First, the idea of focusing on democratization not only as a result, but as part of the process of collaborative redesigning itself. This aspect is aligned with the process-oriented democracy approach defined in Tilly (2007). Second, the shift to the importance of experiential learning over traditional knowledge. And third, the consideration that these democratic experiences at work may be related to more democratic preferences in the civic and political sphere, as well as their contribution to wider networks of democratic practices.

4.   Proposing an analytical framework

This section addresses the challenge of finding a proper democratization framework which considers the three aspects just mentioned at the end of section 3, using the relational democracy approach (Ibarra, 2011) for inspiration.

From this perspective, democratization is understood as the process in which practices "establish and develop a group of relationships between the governing and the governed appropriately led in order to achieve the coincidence between decision-making policies and decisions made by society" (Ibarra, 2011: 37).

As a result of the process-oriented view of democracy, the recognition of the relevance of other stakeholders' participation during the processes, the focus on their practices and their relationship with public institutions, relational democracy seems to sustain the basic principles of AR in general, as well as the more specific ARTD principles.

Furthermore, whereas relational democracy defines governances as spaces open for democratization (Ibarra, 2011), ARTD considers them as the core of the transformation process (Larrea, 2019).

4.1   A tentative analytical framework

This section describes the dimensions of democratization that this paper proposes for ARTD processes. Due to the diversity of aspects involved, a wide variety of analytical democratization frameworks are found in the literature, also with very different focuses. On the one hand, some frameworks center their attention on context characteristics. Others, on the other hand, focus on the call for participation method, or on the quality of the process and results. In this context, I have chosen Ibarra's (2011) proposal as the main reference because, although it was constructed as a forward-looking framework (Ibarra, 2011), it does the best job of synthesizing these different concerns and makes an effort to develop integral ways of analyzing democratization.

In broad terms, Ibarra's (2011) proposal is based firstly on the quality of social and legal democratic conditions in society. It then suggests analyzing democratization by considering (i) the plurality of participants; (ii) organization and decision-making during the process; and

(iii) the impacts and consequences. However, it is not clear if the author was considering AR processes.

Thus, based primarily on Ibarra's contribution, I propose an analytical framework to analyze the degree of democratization in ARTD processes that create new governance spaces for policy. The framework has the following four democratization dimensions: feasibility, inclusiveness, transparency, and effectiveness.

4.1.1   Feasibility

The first factor in evaluating democratization in a governance space is feasibility. Its relevance is based on the existence of the legal, constitutional and political conditions for the development of the process (Ibarra, 2011). The definition and subcategories are defined in Table 4.2.1.

Table 4.2.1: The Feasibility factor

Factor	Definition	Subcategory
Feasibility	Existence of the legal, constitutional and political conditions for the development of the process (Ibarra, 2011; Pogrebinschi, 2013).	**Primary Conditions:** Set of minimum institutional conditions present in society (Ibarra, 2011).
		Formality: A clear and confident process for legal back-up (Pogrebinschi, 2013).
		Role of civil society: Degree of state support to promote and strengthen the associated fabric (Ibarra, 2011; Pogrebinschi, 2013).

4.1.2   Inclusiveness

The second assessing principle, inclusiveness, refers to the idea that "all potentially rule affected people should be included and have access to the processes of participation" (Kamlage & Nanz, 2018: 9). The definition and subcategories are defined in Table 4.2.2:

Table 4.2.2: The Inclusiveness factor

Factor	Definition	Subcategory
Inclusiveness	The intention of the organizers to call for ample and plural participation for the process (Pogrebinschi, 2013: 14; Ureta, 2022: 34).	**Participation:** Absolute and relative numbers of participants, according to social class, gender, educational level and other social and cultural indicators (Pogrebinschi, 2013: 15).
		Deliberation: Organizational rules and procedures, opportunities for expressing and changing preferences, quality

Factor	Definition	Subcategory
		of deliberation (Pogrebinschi, 2013: 15).
		Bindingness: Binding or consultative results, rules ensuring the communication and consideration of the results (Pogrebinschi, 2013: 15).

4.1.3   Transparency

The third factor, transparency, focuses on the possibilities that both participants and the general public have to be informed before, during and after the process. The definition and subcategories are defined in Table 4.2.3:

Table 4.2.3: The Transparency factor

Factor	Definition	Subcategory
Transparency	The possibilities that participants have to understand the conditions under which the process is implemented (Smith, 2009: 29) and that rule-affected people have the equal opportunity to be fully informed about the processes (Kamlage & Nanz, 2018: 10).	**Publicity:** Studies to what extent the process, objectives and results have been communicated to the general public and relevant target groups (Kamlage & Nanz, 2018).
		Internal Transparency: Participants in public participation procedures have access to relevant and professionally prepared information in the process of participation (Kamlage & Nanz, 2018).

4.1.4   Effectiveness

The fourth and final assessment principle, effectiveness, analyzes how resources and discussions are translated into productive, manageable and achievable goals. The definition and subcategories are defined in Table 4.2.4:

Table 4.2.4: The Effectiveness factor

Factor	Definition	Subcategory
Effectiveness	Degree to which a process is able to solve problems, achieve goals (Kamlage & Nanz, 2018: 11) and address citizen concerns through public policies (Ureta, 2022; Ibarra, 2011).	**Thematic Congruence:** intention of defining and promoting laws and policies in consonance with the debates of the participative process (Ureta, 2022; Pogrebinschi, 2013).
		Redistribution: Allocation of state resources or reallocation of budgetary

Factor	Definition	Subcategory
		provisions to historically marginalized groups (Pogrebinschi, 2013).
		Efficiency: A reasonable relation between the limited resources and the means to achieve the objectives (Kamlage & Nanz, 2018).

5.   Methodology of the case study

This paper is not an AR process, but rather a case study based on an ARTD process (the process conducted in Bilbao Next Lab and previously presented) in order to analyze, ex-post, whether AR has had any impact on democratizing governance. To integrate a holistic perspective, I interviewed one representative of each of the stakeholders present in the AR process: a KIBS firm (A1), a provincial government policymaker (A2), a VET center (A3), a regional government policymaker (A4), a City Council policy maker (A5), and the facilitation team (FT1 & FT2).

Considering that the facilitation team is comprised of two different institutions, with a view to achieving transparent dialogues, this group was separated into an individual interview for the Bilbao Ekitza representative (FT1) and a focus group with the two Orkestra facilitators (FT2). The research components are specified in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Technical index of empirical analysis

Research aim	Analyze how ARTD promotes the democratization of governance.
Research method	Case study analysis through a qualitative research design.
Subjects of analysis	The VET – KIBS governance of Bilbao Next Lab.
Statistical population	VET – KIBS governance participants (30 stakeholders).
The stakeholders	Representatives of institutions that have participated actively throughout the entire action research process (6 entities; 8 individuals).
Geographic area	City of Bilbao, Bizkaia province, Basque region, Spain.
Data sources	● In-depth semi-structured online interviews. ● Documentary review. ● Focus group (facilitation team).
Time period	May 4 – 19, 2022.

The case study used ARTD as its methodology. The ARTD researcher-facilitators supported the processes based on eight elements that are extensively described in Larrea (2019), all of which can be considered as interdependent, complementary and at the same time essential:

Table 5.2: The ARTD Elements

ARTD element	Definition
Social capital as the starting point	"The advantage a community has due to the quality of its members' relations" (Larrea, 2019: 27).
Praxis	Refers to the balance between action and reflection in a process.
Cogeneration as a vehicle	Recognizes the relevance of collective knowledge in order to take action on common challenges.
Facilitation	Points out the relevance of the role which drives and accompanies the conversations using a clear and flexible design.
Conflict management	Understands conflicts as natural components in the process.
Emergent strategy	Suggests complementing the linear planning strategy by considering the learning opportunities which may be found during the process.
Soft resistance	Focuses on the tensions that researcher-facilitators have in their relation with the rest of the stakeholders, acting both as a researcher and as a participant in the process.
Territorial role of researchers	Considers university as a territorial stakeholder, "as an active agent of change" (Larrea, 2019: 62).

The aim of this research is to subsequently evaluate whether this process has led to the democratization of governance (described in section 6), but more importantly, to analyze how it has been promoted by ARTD (studied in section 7).

6.   Results of the case study

The analytical framework proposed in this paper inspired the interviews, the revision of project documents and the focus group. Based on the data gathered through these processes, this section presents the perception of participants of whether the ARTD process helped democratize governance for policymaking.

The results of the new analytical framework proposed in this paper are summarized in Table 6.1[1]. The terms *satisfied* and *partially satisfied* (no factor was considered *not satisfied*) synthetize the most frequent perception about whether a factor was satisfactorily addressed through the process. The main considerations for each factor are shared in the Evaluation column of Table 6.1.

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1   The main results with the voice of the participants, originally in Spanish, have been translated as literally as possible, and are presented in the Appendix section specified for each subcategory.

Table 6.1: Democratization results

Factor	Subcategory	Evaluation
Feasibility *Satisfied. The process is in a territory in which the minimum legal and political conditions are covered. Main sources in Appendix 1.*	Primary Conditions	The case study is performed in a context that guarantees at least minimum political and civil rights and liberties.
	Formality	The initiative is supported by a binding contract signed by the main stakeholders.
	Role of civil society	Strong state and regional government support for the social fabric.
Inclusiveness *Partially satisfied. The call for participation and meetings have been structured in order to promote debates, which have been transformed into concrete actions respected at the moment. However, most participants have similar social and cultural backgrounds.*	Participation	Although the group is gender-balanced, most individuals have similar educational, cultural and social backgrounds. Future research can consider the appropriateness of this subcategory for governance spaces, which tend to be composed of representatives of organizations and institutions. *Results in Appendix 2.*
	Deliberation	The facilitation team has built structures and techniques to promote debates. The policy makers' implication has encouraged the expressions of points of view. *Results in Appendix 3.*
	Bindingness	Notwithstanding the engagement of stakeholders and the systematic monitoring of the team facilitator, an effective bindingness will naturally be assessed in the future. *Results in Appendix 4.*
Transparency *Partially satisfied. There is a fluid internal communication among stakeholders. However, no strategy exists to communicate results to the general public.*	Publicity	There are no communication outputs identified for informing the general public. It is considered as an important area for improvement by the stakeholders. *Results in Appendix 5.*
	Internal Transparency	There are several active channels and products of communication persistently sustained by the facilitation team. *Results in Appendix 6.*
Effectiveness *Satisfied. There is a positive feeling that goals have been fulfilled and dis-*	Thematic Congruence	The debates and discussions have been translated into effective changes

Factor	Subcategory	Evaluation
cussions have been translated into concrete actions.		in programs and policies. *Results in Appendix 7.*
	Redistribution	Together with the inclusiveness approach of the specific participants' agendas, procedures and policy decisions focused on recognizing and advocating for the rights of historically excluded groups, and more specifically, young women. *Results in Appendix 8.*
	Efficiency	Both participants and the facilitation team recognize effective flexibility and have a positive impression of goal fulfillment. *Results in Appendix 9.*

7.   Analyzing the role of ARTD in the results

Now that the democratization process has been identified through the four dimensions discussed above, we shall move on to discuss how ARTD may be promoting this process. To that end, ARTD is understood in practice as the working methodology of the facilitation team. This section analyzes to what extent participants, including action researchers, consider that ARTD made a contribution towards enhancing three democratic factors: inclusiveness, transparency and effectiveness. The feasibility factor is not included in this reflection because these are contextual conditions that are not dependent on the facilitation of the process.

Figure 7.1 shows the connections between the eight features of ARTD presented previously and the democratization factors proposed in the framework. Although "the eight ARTD elements can simply been understood through a systemic perspective as elements that conform a whole, and which at the same time are influenced by this whole" (Larrea, 2019: 25), some findings are highlighted.

A deep and diverse bonding system can be conceptually recognized, in which the democratization factors hold to all ARTD elements. In some way, all the ARTD elements are promoting the development of the democratization factor.

Figure 7.1: ARTD and democratization bonding system results
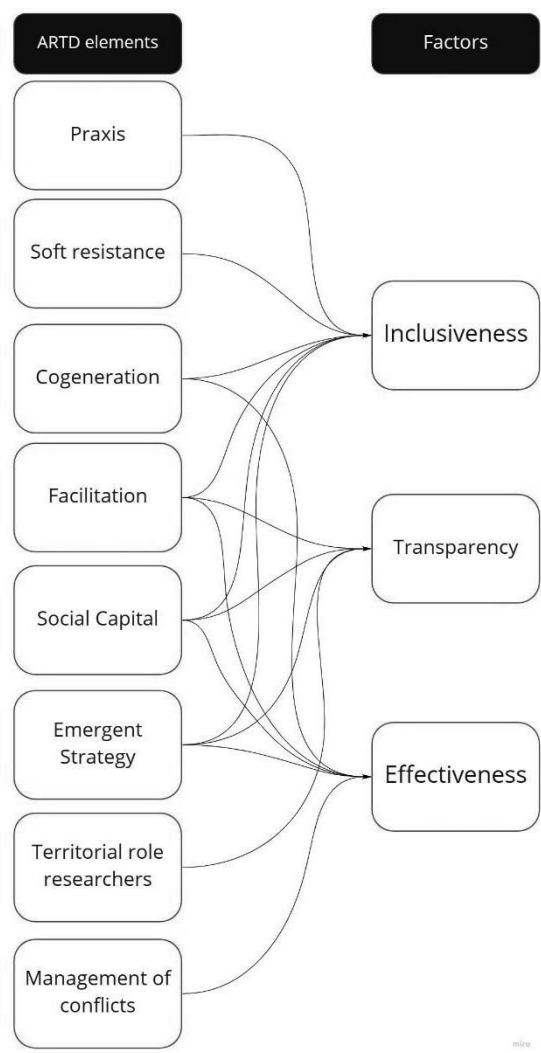
The upcoming sections analyze the perception of participants of how ARTD supported each democratization factor.

7.1   ARTD as a promoter of the Inclusiveness Factor

Through interviews and the focus group, participants recognized that the ARTD has supported a more extensive and plural call and stakeholder participation. Table 7.1 expresses the way in which these participants expressed their perspective on how some ARTD elements are involved:

Table 7.1: ARTD inclusiveness results

ARTD Element	Representative Quotes	Factor
Cogeneration	"Some elements were designed and executed in a more rewarding and enriching way than others, but all of them were within the limits. When you design something you run the risk that an initiative will evolve, but I think the group assumes this will happen and accepts it" (A4).	
Social Capital	"The most difficult thing is to connect individuals who can make it happen, and in this case it was essential to make this connection in order to get things started. Connecting individuals and stakeholders was made possible by the facilitation team" (A1).	
Emergent Strategy	"We developed our strategy as we went along, with a clear objective: no political jargon – just creation. It was a very natural path, fresh and intuitive, with policymaking taking a back seat" (A5).	Inclusiveness
Facilitation	"Orkestra's facilitation is essential because they are aware of the limits of each actor and they never overstep. This creates a stronger feeling of trust in the group, which facilitates actions. When you see positive results, everyone starts to become more involved" (A4).	
Soft Resistance	"Earlier during the first stage we put forward the idea of additional business representation, but we were told that this was better left for later" (A3).	
Praxis	"Participants are well informed. They are trainers who have been doing this for a long time (...), so their shared knowledge is very valuable, and this has helped me quite a bit" (A2).	

Source: Joaquin Oliva.

7.2 ARTD as a promoter of the Transparency Factor

The facilitation team followed ARTD principles to generate diverse communication channels and products before, during and after every work meeting, which are positively assessed by the participants. The following ARTD elements described in Table 7.2 seem to be operating in favor of this factor:

Table 7.2: ARTD transparency results

ARTD Element	Representative Quotes	Factor
Emergent Strategy	"There is plenty of room for improvement in how we share the value of these stakeholders with society to show how it affects my quality of life" (FT2).	Transparency
Territorial role of researchers	"Our strategy is based on research. Each step is based on the evidence that was discovered in the previous step" (FT2).	
Social capital	"Always having information was key. The facilitation team called me multiple times to see if everything was going okay, and I felt comfortable and integrated" (A3).	
Facilitation	"I would say that there was really good communication and facilitation. This has a great impact, because it is not simply that you have a lot of information, which can actually become an obstacle, but that you have all of the necessary information for proper monitoring of the process so it can be successful and deliver good results" (A4).	

Source: Joaquín Oliva.

7.3   ARTD as a promoter of the effectiveness factor

The ARTD facilitation team's top priority of building trust relationships in the group may have led to greater flexibility and a positive assessment of the fulfillment of short-term goals, culminating in concrete policy changes. Representative quotes on identified ARTD elements are shown in Table 7.3:

Table 7.3: ARTD effectiveness results

ARTD Element	Representative Quotes	Factor
Emergent Strategy	"A lot of doors opened during the process. I agree that the Shadowing project emerged unexpectedly. The conclusion here is that the facilitator is an essential element" (FT2).	Effectiveness
Facilitation	"I don't know if these were the original goals, but they were pursued, and (the facilitators) took them on board and took action" (A1).	
Social capital	"We involved actors who have the ability to influence policy and who are willing to share and create spaces to co-define policies when it is in their remit. (…) They are willing to share in order to define policy. And there is a lot of work behind this. In the end, we as participating researchers have the obligation of making them aware of the potential they have for transforming specific ideas into policy" (FT2).	

ARTD Element	Representative Quotes	Factor
Cogeneration	"I feel that everything was done quickly and effectively, and (the facilitators) have helped with the initiatives from start to finish" (A1).	
Conflict management	"We were able to openly address and resolve all misunderstandings, and this is extremely helpful. Sometimes we find that we work at a different pace or have different strategic visions, but the way this works means we are always focused on a goal" (FT1).	

Source: Joaquín Oliva.

8. Conclusions

Since the origins of action research, AR processes have had a declared intention of democratizing the spaces where are applied, with a clear connection to wider democratic network practices. As an approach that emerged from this legacy, ARTD can also be considered as part of this challenge.

Going deeper into this relationship, the relational democracy approach (Ibarra, 2011) is offered as a framework for hosting AR processes. In this context, in order to provide more comprehensive methods of analyzing democratization, and with the intention of bringing this concept closer to AR experiences, a tentative analytical framework has been suggested in section 4 to define the democratic dimensions for AR processes.

These democratization dimensions have been first applied in this paper to the Bilbao Next Lab governance space, in the Basque Country, Spain.

Table 6.1 of this paper describes the democratization results of the case study. These findings may act in the future as a working tool for recognizing and reflecting on which aspects have been fulfilled, and which aspects are yet to be addressed by action research teams in their specific processes with democratic intentions.

For instance, Bilbao Next Lab's governance indicates the challenges of including more socially and culturally diverse individuals in the debate space, of ensuring that collective decisions are correctly implemented, and of creating a communication strategy which responds to society in general.

Perhaps the most important conclusion, however, is that this research analyzes how ARTD may be affecting these democratization results. Section 7 identifies the significant contribution of ARTD to the three democratic factors, with representative quotes from participants.

Further studies could use this new framework for other governance spaces or any collaborative spaces, as well as for processes facilitated through new or different AR approaches.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Feasibility factor analysis — main sources

Subcategory	Documentary Analysis
Primary Conditions	The Freedom House (2022). *Freedom in the World Report.*
Formality	Framework Partnership Agreement Legal Document (non-public).
Role of civil society	Social Action NGO Platform (2020). *Third Sector Social Action in Spain 2019: New Horizons for a New Sociopolitical Context.* Basque Third Sector Social Observatory Team (2021). White Book of the Third Sector in Euskadi 2020.

Appendix 2: Participation subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
Participants were open to the possibility of incorporating new stakeholders in upcoming stages.	"In a future process for sure, and possibly even in this one, we could include a new stakeholder" (A5). "We need parents who are switched on and who can tell their children that there is a promising future here. I don't know if through community organizations, but somehow we have to transmit more to society" (A4). "Community representatives, which is where the process is going to have an impact. Perhaps we should have included them sooner – parents' associations, youth organizations, business associations…anything" (FT1).
Satisfaction was high due to the participation of all of the stakeholders directly involved in the challenge.	"In my view, all stakeholders are perfectly represented in this project" (A2). "Thanks to the fact that the stakeholders were properly identified, everything is working smoothly" (A4).
There is a potential concern about overly complicating the process by including more stakeholders.	"Sometimes new groups come and address other issues, distorting the path the project is taking. I'm doubtful as to whether this is a good idea" (A4). "Considering the challenges and the goals we have set, this doesn't seem like a good idea

Results	Representative Quotes
	because it is too technical and you need to be familiar with the legislation" (A3).
The facilitation team considers the stakeholders' capacity of engagement, decision-making and effectiveness in relation to the shared challenge.	"Finding people who are committed to the challenge and are willing to devote time and resources is one of the keys to the success of this type of process" (FT2).
The facilitation team guides and encourages participants to invite the involvement of other stakeholders affected by the challenge.	"We all decided together who would participate. The initial decision was for Bilbao Ekintza and Orkestra, and the decision for a new group was the result of a workshop decision" (FT1). "The original ARTD determined that in order to address a challenge, all stakeholders must be involved. You have to create the conditions of that mapping and engage the stakeholders in the process somehow. This is based on the concept of complexity" (FT2).

Appendix 3: Deliberation subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
The discussion is considered highly participative, making it possible to build rewarding proposals based on the experience and perspectives of all of the stakeholders involved.	"I think it was a really participative way of working. At the end of the discussion you have all of the feedback and all of the conclusions that were reached, including what each person said. Sharing knowledge really adds a lot, and it was really helpful for me" (A2). "I certainly felt comfortable expressing what I felt and believe, and we reached our conclusions by working together" (A4).
The engagement and capacity of the political representatives encouraged the exchange of opinions in order to change policy.	"I had the opportunity to go to a larger group meeting and you really see that those who are on top, the politicians, are fully involved and amenable to changing policy, or at least as far as is possible" (A2).
The facilitation team structures each workshop using different methods to encourage dialogue as a means for reaching an understanding.	"The key to reaching a consensus lies in the workshops, which is where everything comes together. We put the decisions up to debate, and from there, we construct a common project – an agreement" (FT2).

Results	Representative Quotes
	"Each workshop uses AR – first a reflection phase, and then an action phase, and to do that, there is a moment of collective decision-making" (FT2).
The facilitation team establishes dynamics so that all aspects are determined by the group—from defining the challenge, to the rules of working together, the roles of participants and the steps to follow.	"I think the key is not so much in the dynamics, but in the fact that you have something to contribute in each workshop. You are building something or offering solutions, and there should always be that feeling that you are creating added value" (FT2). "The key lies in submitting the decisions that have been taken to the group so that the process can move forward" (FT2).
The facilitation team considers casual communication with stakeholders to be a relevant aspect of collective decision-making.	"There is an essential human component in this process of facilitation. All of these informal conversations are extremely valuable and very difficult to measure" (FT2).
The facilitation team is identified as being responsible for the connection and integration of participants and process.	"The facilitation team made this all possible. The most difficult aspect is connecting the people who can make it happen, and for me this was the key to being able to connect and making this a reality" (A1). "I think that (the facilitators) do a great job of facilitating, and at every meeting they clearly explain where we are coming from and where we are going, so it is easy to follow the route" (A4).

Appendix 4: Bindingness subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
The decisions and proposals made by the group have been implemented in accordance with the agreed upon methods and timelines.	"Until now they have been (implemented), and I think this is a really good method" (A5). "I think that everything is being respected in a very reasonable manner" (A3).
The challenge of assessing proper implementation of the group's decisions during the next political term was identified.	"The challenge lies in maintaining these decisions over time, beyond those of us who are currently present" (A5).
The facilitation team identifies the engagement of political stakeholders as an essential element for effectively promoting agreements.	"It is remarkable that there are such highly engaged groups. This is possible due to the continuous and visible strategic and political leadership driving participation throughout the project. Interest and visibility are maintained throughout the process, which is essential" (FT1).
The facilitation team constantly monitors the commitments made by participants.	"The facilitation team must be persistent, because participants commit to actions during the workshops that are later forgotten. They have to be gently reminded" (FT2). "I think that the organizers are highly disciplined regarding timelines, and in reminding stakeholders of their commitments" (A2).
The facilitation team structures the relevant information in order to create an account of what was covered and what remains to be done during the year in response to the established goals.	"We want to be present on the agendas of the different stakeholders. Structuring the information has the role of recording the decisions and commitments that have been made" (FT2). "One of the facilitator's roles is to begin workshops by reminding participants of what decisions have been made and why, for full transparency" (FT2).

Appendix 5: Publicity subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
No initiatives were put forward to communicate the process and the results to the general public.	"To date we have not made any statements for the general public" (A5). "There is no indication that this has been done, and for something so general, I find it surprising" (A3). "As this was a pilot project, we are still in the experimentation phase and have not communicated the results of the project to the wider community" (FT2).
Participants consider it both challenging and necessary to inform the target audience of the challenge and the efforts that are being made to improve wellbeing in this area.	"For me it is essential to begin sowing the seeds with our target audience—young people and their families" (A2). "When communicating our message, I would primarily share the results. If we only talk about the context, people lose interest. Communication is always a good idea, but I'm not sure what kind of an impact it will have" (A4).
The facilitation team has identified room for improvement in communicating project results to the wider community.	"Stakeholders can be mouthpieces for communicating the results to the wider community. This is an area we still need to work on" (FT2). "What the group is lacking is a plan for selling this project, how to get it out there. We don't even have a name for the project" (FT1).

Appendix 6: Internal transparency subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
In-person and online meetings are a valuable way to gain insight into the key aspects of the project.	"I get the information first-hand at the workshops, and afterwards I receive the minutes with all of the details. Before each workshop I receive information on the date, the attending participants, a detailed account of the content of the workshop, and if a presentation is going to be made, the name of the institution and the organizer" (A2). "I learned about the evolution and the launch of the project through the periodical and inclusive meetings, where pains were taken to make sure everyone was well informed" (A1).
Informal communication channels such as casual conversation and phone calls are considered relevant ways of keeping participants up to date on the key aspects of the process.	"Orkestra gets in touch with me to let me know the date and the objective of the next session, and they ask if I would change or suggest anything. It's like a mini-interview or brainstorming session" (A4). "Casual communication, phone calls and WhatsApp messages make the project more holistic" (A5). "The impact (of the calls) is that you keep the flame burning. The engagement of the stakeholders shows that there is a lot of planning going on to maintain commitment to the project" (FT1)
Participants have received quality information products that enhance the process.	"We receive an account of the meeting, which includes the next steps in the process and the following workshop. It is very detailed information that includes the contributions of each participant, even in the break-out groups" (A2). "The information is comprehensive and practical, including the topics of each workshop and the minutes to ensure that everyone is on the same page" (A1).
The facilitation team considers that a key to success lies in providing material and structuring the process before, during and after the workshops.	"The workshops are the core area where AR and the transformation process can occur. Presentations and structure help to create a better reading of the process, making it easier to define decisions and follow up to ensure that they are successfully implemented" (FT2).

Appendix 7: Thematic coherence subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
Participants feel that the conditions required for implementing changes in public policy were created and specified.	"It's not just about creating good policy, but also about building on existing policy, and these spaces help to align needs with legislative potential" (A3). "We have already launched KIBS specialisation programs in VET centres. We have invested in classrooms and areas equipped with state-of-the-art technology so people can become more familiar with the digital transformation" (A4).
Participants perceive political intention and flexibility of the legislative framework in favour of policymaking and policy modification.	"One positive aspect of the Basque Country that I haven't seen in other parts of Spain is that policy is adapted to the needs of everyone, and not the other way around" (A1). "I perceived quick and flexible changes from the Basque government" (A2).
The discussion and debate process has transformed the implementation of actions and changes in policy.	"The results of the debates held during the process are now visible in VET policy, as well as in vocational training for the unemployed, although to a lesser extent. Municipal policy is benefitting greatly from these debates, and they have allowed us to define highly focused niche projects" (A5). "VET has benefitted greatly from everything that has been discussed and debated, and we are now working with companies" (A4).
The facilitation team considers that the legitimate work methods of stakeholders has contributed to the process.	"We had been working with Nora, the former director of Bilbao Ekintza, since 2016, and we had built up legitimacy and methodology" (FT2). "They delegate in us 100 %. We find solutions because we have a methodology" (FT2).

Appendix 8: Redistribution subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
There is an explicit intention of participants and specific actions for promoting equal opportunities for women.	"Equal opportunities for women is something I put on the table from the very beginning. It is a problem stemming from society, and this analysis has led to specific policies" (A1). "The underlying reasons are clear to me: firstly, there are not enough people, and secondly, we have to create more opportunities for women, so they have the same opportunities as men. It will benefit everyone, and women above all" (A2).
The inclusion of marginalized groups is a shared goal of all stakeholders.	"We include people with no formal training and immigrants from very complex backgrounds. We are talking about VET programs that are not only inclusive but that also display solidarity" (A3). "I am sure that this will be included in everything that is done. The more diverse we make it, the greater impact it will have in society" (A1).
The facilitation team considers public policymakers whose political agendas include promoting solutions for marginalized groups as participants in the process.	"Disadvantaged groups were part of this process because it was on the policymakers' agendas" (FT2). "As an institution, we have signed a letter of commitment (for inclusion). This should strongly influence all initiatives" (FT1).
The facilitation team designs dynamics so that issues discussed in the workshops can appear on future agendas.	"Our work method allows these issues to appear on the agenda of our project. This came up in the workshops, and the companies agreed. So in the end, we also decide what issues to push" (FT2). "The agendas are established, but the facilitation of the process allows them to be put into practice" (FT2).

Appendix 9: Efficiency subcategory results

Results	Representative Quotes
It is too soon to assess the main objectives of the project due to their long-term nature.	"I feel that the project is based on cultural aspects that need attention in the long term" (A2). "We don't expect immediate results with high school students. What I see is an action that can be maintained and extended over time, and in that case what we are doing can contribute to this changing trend" (A3).
Participants identified the need for more resources to design actions for implementing long-term goals.	"Particularly as regards the dissemination of the benefits of this project, we want the message to reach families, VET centres, young people…and to do that we need more resources and a long-term vision" (A2).
Participants consider that resource management is appropriate for fulfilling short-term goals.	"Actions have been quick and effective, and initiatives have been followed through from start to finish" (A1). "Now we are focusing on the short term, on pressing actions. I understand that with the available time more could not be done" (A3).
The facilitation team moves the process forward based on a set of pre-defined conditions.	"We always try to remain within the pre-existing possibilities, based on a set of previously defined conditions, which makes our work viable" (EF2).
The facilitation team uses trust as a foundation for creating the basic conditions of a process that is able to respond to change and is consistent with targets and timeframes.	"We have forged a relationship of trust and generosity anchored in strong collaboration. This helped us to openly resolve any misunderstandings" (EF1). "I would say that dialogue and respect are Orkestra's greatest assets. They have the ability to adapt to different working styles and ensure that no one is left out" (A4).

Retrospective Action Research on Facilitating Equitable Learning Outcomes in a Diverse Class

Ariane Janse van Rensburg

Abstract: In a South African class with complex diversity, certain student groupings were not performing equitably in relation to their potential. An Educational Action Research (AR) process of designing multiple, integrated practice changes over three years successfully redressed disparities, but the full impact of interventions could only be analysed in retrospect. Combining empirical observations with subsequent data collection to produce a theorised model, a transferable methodology using quantitative triangulation was designed to overcome the challenges of a rigorous retrospective AR study. This article discusses the integrated teaching interventions and the application of retrospective AR methodology.

Keywords: action research, retrospective study, equitable learning outcomes, diversity

La Investigación Acción restrospectiva en la facilitación de resultados equitativos del aprendizaje en una clase diversa

Resumen: En una clase de Sudáfrica con diversidad compleja, algunos grupos de estudiantes no estaban teniendo logros que se correspondían equitativamente con su potencial. Un proceso de investigación acción educativa (IA) en el que se diseñaron cambios múltiples e integrados en la práctica a lo largo de tres años ajustó estas disparidades con éxito, pero el conjunto del impacto de las intervenciones sólo pudo ser analizado en retrospectiva. Mediante la combinación de observaciones empíricas y la subsiguiente recolección de datos para producir un modelo teorizado, se ha diseñado una metodología transferible que utiliza una triangulación cuantitativa para superar los retos a los que se enfrenta un estudio de IA retrospectivo riguroso. Este artículo debate las intervenciones educativas y la aplicación de la metodología retrospectiva de IA que se produjeron de forma integrada.

Palabras clave: Investigación acción, estudio retrospectivo, resultados de aprendizaje equitativos, diversidad

1.   The problem context

This project did not start as an educational research study – it was simply an urgent teaching problem to be solved. I had started teaching Architectural Design (AD) to a first-year class in a Bachelor of Architectural Studies (BAS) degree at a South African university, using the pre-existing course, and found that in a class of students coming from diverse lived experiences, students with the same potential were not achieving the same academic outcomes. The learning outcomes were non-negotiable for the accreditation of the degree, the syllabus was set and the variables that I could redesign were the approach, format and content of actual

lectures and tutorials, assignments, student support and ways of teaching. In the context of a previously racially segregated society, epistemological access to university degrees was a social justice issue. My immediate challenges were: How should I change my teaching to give all students equitable access to successful academic outcomes? Equally importantly, how could I equip future architects with a broader social understanding that would enable them to be relevant designers in a diverse society? These problems had to be solved in action, without the time to test them. We tried various, simultaneous, potential solutions, making it difficult to track which teaching changes produced which results. The other key question was whether first-year teaching interventions could create a foundation for ongoing success in future learning.

2.   Introduction

The process of developing improved ways of teaching AD happened over the three years in which I led the first-year AD course. By the end of this time there was an ever-improving pass-rate in the course, and it also seemed that students who had done the revised course continued to perform successfully afterwards. This merited a formal study, which was accepted as a PhD proposal, and is described in detail in the dissertation (Janse van Rensburg, 2015). The objective of the retrospective study, conducted after the changes in teaching had been completed, was to confirm whether these changes had indeed improved learning outcomes, whether these outcomes were sustained after completing the course, whether equal opportunities could be created by using this model, and to produce a theoretical model that could be applied in similar contexts.

AR principles had been followed from the beginning using a practice mode with a strong secondary emancipating mode (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003), but the retrospective study required a shift to a knowledge-generating mode which presented additional methodological challenges. This paper also aims to describe the methods that were used to meet the criteria of dependability/reliability and process validity in a situation where student feedback and certain types of evidence were not consistently collected when the interventions started, and where continued outcomes could only be assessed after some time had elapsed. I believe that this can provide a precedent for similar studies where some data can only be collected after the actual interventions have been completed.

The contribution of this paper to the field of AR is therefore two-fold: It addresses the question of how equitable academic success can be facilitated in diverse learning communities, as well as how to produce valid AR in a context where one has to resort to retrospective data collection.

The action outcome of this study was that students' overall academic outcomes improved, and there was a much more equitable distribution of marks in the class, as we developed strategically sequenced educational tasks to build a foundation of social and academic skills while teaching the formal syllabus. This pattern of improved performance continued as these students progressed into subsequent years of study. This research is relevant in many diverse learning communities where disparities in prior experience can polarise or enrich learning, particularly in the escalating context of global migration.

The retrospective AR study triangulated study data with quantitative data from other sources, producing clear correlations and confirming the validity of this method. It produced valuable longer-term insights and conclusions that could not have been obtained within the time frame of the interventions. This methodology is particularly appropriate for complex situations where the effects of different interventions can only become clear to participants over time.

AR literature tends to focus on defined problems which can be addressed and assessed within the scope of a clear, short-term study. AR is however an effective tool for addressing complex, "wicked" challenges, and these studies are seldom described in textbook educational AR. I believe it is important to expand the methodology to explore this field.

This paper is structured to cover the choice of methodology with its attendant challenges in section 3, the socio-political and pedagogic context in which the problems developed and had to be addressed in section 4, and moves to the action component of the study in section 5: the problems, causes, theoretical base for interventions and the interventions themselves. In section 6 it discusses the research component, outlining the study parameters, how data was collected, processed and analysed, and the model construction. In section 7 the outcomes of the interventions are discussed in relation to the different types of data analysis and research validity is confirmed. Section 8 concludes with the learning from this study, both on pedagogy and on AR methodology.

3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of methodology

This complex course design challenge was very similar to an architectural design project, which as an architect, I initially approached in the same way. Every architectural design is a research project. One has to collect data on the context, the limitations, the challenges, the ideal functioning of the proposed facility, the available resources and technologies and successful precedents. One is in a constant dialogue with the client to understand his/her needs and wants, and whether the design is addressing them. One has to understand the theory, and from an analysis of this complexity produce a single, integrated proposal that addresses all these issues. After testing the proposed solution against these criteria, one evaluates and adjusts it, until one reaches a satisfactory balance of outcomes and then resubmits this to the client for critique. It is a cyclical dialogue of problem definition, design, testing, observation and improvement, very equivalent to an Action Research (AR) process, but it has the advantage of being able to test multiple iterations before building the final one.

The closest recognised research methodology was Educational AR, as in addition to comprising cycles of improvement, I was applying "informed, committed and intentional educational action (McNiff, 2010, p. 16)" that problematised existing forms of educational practice (Newton & Burgess, 2008). It was participatory in that the process was constantly being informed by conversations with students and colleagues, all changes were immediately tested by students and their learning outcomes were assessed throughout this process, informing the process. It conformed to McNiff's definitions, as it centred around my own learning in order to bring about social and educational change in my studio, hoping to

establish more equitable education praxis (social justice) in a broader academic and pro-fessional context (McNiff, 2010). This resonates with Kemmis and McTaggart's (2003) emphasis on aiming to bring about changes in people's learning, actions, values, interactions and interpretations. The people in question were my co-teachers, my students and myself as we interacted to create a better integration between our roles and the course content.

Although the action component progressed with some momentum in this direction, it was only two years into the process that it became a research study, producing some challenges that had to be specifically addressed.

3.2   Methodological challenges and limitations

Retrospective student feedback: The only formal feedback from students on our teaching at the time of the course changes was the standard annual university course evaluation, in which the questions did not specifically address our interventions. Because ethical approval for the study had to be obtained before students could be formally questioned on their experience, this only happened after students had completed the course and had to rely on their recollections. As they were no longer primarily focused on this course and some were no longer on campus, there was a low response rate. The academic staff being questioned had to recollect specific observations on a repetitive timeline of similar events, and in all these situations the validity of memories had to be confirmed.

Complexity: Many educational AR projects set out to address and improve a single issue with a single intervention, making it simple to design a study and attribute causality. This study contained many integrated variables, while both the course and the students had changed every year, making it more difficult to make comparisons and ascribe causality.

Limited documentation of student learning: The consistent data from the study period was a full and meticulous recorded of every student's marks per assignment, but this is a com-pressed quantitative indicator of the combination of skills, understanding, learning, time constraints, personal challenges and available resources. The formative discussions en route to those marks had been oral and unrecorded. I had informal notes on particular students' work and random projects that were documented for administrative reasons[1], but it was a concern whether this data would be sufficiently representative to achieve saturation in a qualitative research context.

Undocumented observations and changes: AD is primarily taught in a studio format, where students present their work for critique and there is the opportunity for teacher interaction with every student. My role as the studio leader was to design the detailed course content and give the lectures, while I was assisted by three equally qualified part time co-teachers ("staff tutors") in studio critiques. As a teaching team we gained considerable insight into every student's engagement, effort and understanding and the common learning problems that emerged in the class, but our observations and discussions at the time were not documented. The rationale for changes to teaching formats, although carefully considered and agreed on as a team, had not been documented per se, and there was no consistent reflexive journaling.

1   Digital submissions were not yet the norm during the study period.

3.3   Research rigour

In the context of the outlined limitations, the retrospective study required:

- A forensic reconstruction of everything that had been observed, taught and changed in the AD course over the three cycles of change being studied, to locate evidence of student learning outcomes on this timeline.
- Establishing the validity of certain constants that could be used to benchmark outcomes in various situations that could not be compared directly.
- Triangulating between as much past data and contemporary recollection as possible in order to confirm validity. This included an extensive peer-review process.
- Structuring questions to participants to focus on the current effect of past interventions rather than the detail of the intervention at the time.

4.   The practice context

To facilitate equitable learning outcomes, it was necessary to realign teaching biases with changes in the South African student population, and some background is necessary to contextualise this study.

4.1   Socio-political context

The problem context is that Architecture has for long remained a particularly elitist profession, especially in South Africa where prior to democracy, studying architecture was limited to universities that only admitted White students. Although private schooling was always open to those who could pay, government school education was at the time segregated into racial categories, where generally only urban "White" schools prepared learners well for university. This did not change much after democracy, excepting that it became possible for a small percentage of better-resourced Black[2] learners to move or travel to previously White areas in historically segregated cities for schooling. The selection processes that allow students to study Architecture have traditionally favoured students with high architectural cultural capital, which are generally related to international standards of schooling, art education and the ability to travel internationally and experience architecture. As long as this type of prior knowledge and college-readiness could be assumed, teaching remained largely unchanged.

After democracy in South Africa in 1994, architectural studies became accessible to anyone who met the selection criteria. These have always required a good academic record, but other aspects were Euro-centrically biased. Some universities have in the last decade broadened their other criteria to prioritise potential ability and motivation over cultural capital. Since democracy, government funding has been made available to students who would previously have been economically excluded from attending university. The aim has been to transform the demographic profile of universities and professions, but the profile of architecture degree-students only started to diversify significantly in the last decade. All South

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2   In line with current usage, this denotes all ethnicities that were not previously racially classifies as "White"

African universities have also shown markedly lower throughput levels across all fields during this period, caused by other factors than diversity.

The student diversity to be addressed in the BAS degree is complex, and there are no simple corollaries between any of the other variables, including ethnicity. Students now represent the full economic and schooling spectrum, with an increasing number of first-from-family university students. Some students come from rural areas with no first-hand experience of architect-designed buildings or urban complexity; some students have little previous technical experience; some no computer literacy and some no art training. AD demands strong analytical and creative skills which are still not taught at many secondary schools. The language of instruction at the study site is English, which for more than half the students is not their home language.

When I first taught the first-year AD course I discovered to my concern that by mid-year, in a class of students with very comparable and high potential, 50 % of the Black students were failing, compared to 12.5 % of the White students. Clearly our teaching was not equally accessible to all students.

The history of racial integration in higher education in South Africa since 1994 has been led by pragmatic policy changes that first addressed the most obvious discrepancies. The issues that remained unresolved by these changes became the next focus of attention. This roughly followed a trajectory of opening physical universities access, providing more personal support to students (bursaries, more on-campus accommodation and bus services, feeding schemes); offering additional generic academic support courses to first-from-family students or students identified as "at risk of failing" and trying to facilitate social belonging by nominally recognising different histories and cultures (Council on Higher Education, 2010), but this only recently started to move towards a discourse about academic paradigm shifts and decoloniality (Jansen, 2019). Transformative change at universities has been implemented at an institutional level, but changes to individual courses have been at the initiative of individual teachers (Council on Higher Education, 2010).

4.2 Institutional pedagogic context

The architectural education framework followed at our university follows an internationally accredited studio teaching model, suitably adapted to local circumstances, which can potentially respond to the challenges we encountered, if pedagogy is approached inclusively. AD is the core course in every year of study and a student must pass this to proceed to the next level. AD integrates and applies all the knowledge that is taught separately in students' other courses. The basic skills and concepts that are taught in first year are applied in increasingly complex contexts in second and third year, making passing first-year AD the gatekeeper for the profession. Every year 70 to 75 new students are admitted into first year, and the class may have up to ten additional students who are repeating the course. Within this small group there is a wide range of demographic variables, so there are many different combinations of needs. The formal timetable for BAS is completely full – it is not possible to add an hour a week. The learning challenges that students face are often broader than mastering AD per se, but since AD teaching methods can be flexible and the course takes up most of students' timetabled and self-study time, it can be redesigned to integrate the required additional or broader learning within the same time constraints.

The generally accepted learning format for AD is that students all work on their design assignments in a physical studio space, where peer discussion takes place. For each assignment students are given a specific site and a design brief. In the studio, in small groups, students' developing designs are individually critiqued (formative assessment) by staff tutors, enabling them to also learn from each other's feedback. This is a scaffolded learning process as described in Vygotski's proximal development zone theory (Daniels, 1996) in which tutors impart both tacit and theoretical knowledge (Schön, 1983) specific to each student's project. This learning process is supported by lectures in which the theoretical content for the assignment is explained to students, but the additional content specific to each particular design is given in the critiques. In the design of the AD course there is the opportunity to use some studio time for workshops, tutorials or field trips.

This learning process in which there is individual communication with each student around their insights and understandings provides an ideal platform for informal communication with students around their learning, which barriers they experience and how these could be overcome, e. g. if a student was not applying a principle that had been explained in a lecture, I could ask whether my explanation had made sense to her, and her response would explain whether she did not understand the terminology, or that she could never attend that lecture because the last bus left earlier, or that she did not know how to apply that theory in practice.

The other formal opportunities for student participation in addressing learning challenges were my monthly meetings with student class representatives, who would also message me about any general problems the class was experiencing. In these meetings I often sought their feedback on potential solutions.

I also set up individual meetings with students who were falling behind to discuss their progress and to encourage them to develop strategies to overcome individual challenges. Other students also spontaneously came to discuss the learning they required to reach their goals. This range of conversations gave teachers a relatively deep understanding of students' circumstances and aspirations within the normal teaching format.

All the different teaching modalities and communication opportunities together make up the triad of course content, teacher knowledge and student engagement required to support the educational task according to the theories developed by Doyle (1983), as described in City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel's instructional core diagram (2009) (see figure 1). They summarise that learning happens and shows in the educational task, and that to improve learning, all three support components must be changed – simply adding course content or encouraging student engagement in isolation will not bring about the desired improvement. The advantage of design assignments rather than tests as educational tasks is that they give substantial qualitative evidence of which learning outcomes are achieved or not achieved.

The "student engagement" component which in this model signifies students' engagement with study material and assignments, simultaneously presents an opportunity for students and teachers to engage in a dialogue about their learning.

The final outcome of each design process is the submitted assignment presentation, which is summatively assessed by the whole teaching team in relation to all the required outcomes. Outcomes are simple in early assignments, accumulate in subsequent assignments and must all be successfully integrated in the last assignment. At the end of the year each student pins up all assignments for an integrated oral assessment of whether (s)he has met the required learning outcomes for the year, and is questioned on his/her application of design theory by examiners. This final assessment has enough weight (30 %) to allow a student to pass the year

Fig. 1 City et al's Instructional Core Diagram (Janse van Rensburg, 2015, p. 73)
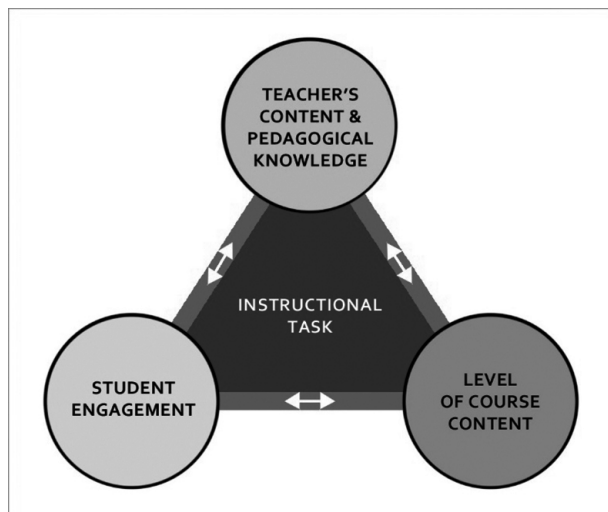
if all the required outcomes have been achieved, even if they were not yet evident in earlier assignments, or to fail if there is insufficient evidence of understanding. The final year mark for AD is therefore an integrated assessment of all required design learning outcomes, and a good measure of successful architectural learning.

5.   The action component

5.1   Problems

Within the outlined practice context, a range of problems that affect learning started to manifest in the more diverse studio that do not necessarily occur to the same extent in more homogeneous, privileged environments. They included the following:

- Students with little exposure to precedents relied mainly on their imagination, without seeking contextual grounding.
- The students who most needed knowledge, did not attend the lectures.
- Students tended to work in isolation and not present work for critique until they considered it to be "complete". If they had misunderstood the brief, or were designing from a problematic premise, it was too late to restart. Since they were not developing their ideas in relation to feedback, they were not learning and tended to think that a first idea was a resolved design, misjudging what was required.
- Students often did not design to the requirements of the brief, and sometimes not respond to advice.
- Some students thought of design as a drawing, and not a representation of something that should work in real life, while others did not have the basic drawing skills to communicate the practical idea that they envisaged.

- Some students could not adequately express their ideas in English when presenting their work, while many students who were orally adequate struggled with written academic English.
- Most students struggled to meet submission deadlines.

5.2   Underlying causes

Before I started teaching first-year AD, the course had been taught in the same format for several years and I had already observed gaps in students' knowledge and understanding in later years of study, so I modified the course from the outset by adding formerly-assumed content. With time it became obvious that even when this content was available, there were barriers to student engagement with the learning process which could not ethically be dismissed as "students' own responsibility". As clarified in instructional core theory (City et al., 2009), addressing these barriers also required additional teacher knowledge and skill, particularly in social theory and pedagogy.

We became increasingly aware of students' challenges and circumstances through informal conversations with students, especially those relating to requests for deferred submissions. When expected learning outcomes did not manifest, we questioned students to find out which learning barriers they experienced, and keenly observed their work and their interactions.

Student engagement with lecturers was strongly affected by their design confidence, leading to self-perpetuating spirals of engagement and success, or avoidance and failure, producing a growing learning differential (see figure 2).

Fig. 2 Spirals of student engagement (Janse van Rensburg, 2015, p. 152)
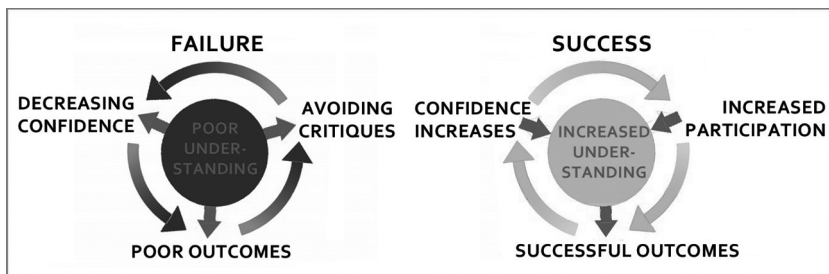
There were many underlying causes for poor confidence and engagement with lecturers and peers, including social exclusion related to internalised dominance and oppression (Davis & Steyn, 2012). If students felt underprepared, they did not want this to show, so in a context where peer discussion can bridge many gaps, students tended to keep to their own social silos, not benefiting from each others' experiences and understandings. Lack of understanding of instruction was often due to inadequate English skills, inadequate grounding in higher-level academic skills that included finding and managing information, argument construction, time management, etc. First-from family students often did not know how to negotiate the university environment and expectations. Students with economic constraints could often not afford the taxi fare to attend lectures or studios. In a very demanding course, some students

who could not afford campus accommodation wasted many hours a day commuting, or figuring out how to negotiate a new environment, and no one had the time to attend the generic support courses offered by the university (Janse van Rensburg, 2015).

Some of these causes were course-related and some personal, but if the effect of personal difficulties could be minimised through course design, e. g. by ending studios before the last bus left, or specifying drawing sizes that could be printed on home printers, it was important to understand and accommodate this.

5.3   Theoretical base for interventions

To understand and address the observed phenomena that caused sub-optimal learning required a broad theoretical base ranging from design pedagogy, language learning, college readiness, critical social theory, transformation theory, contextual knowledge on the history of education in South Africa and theory of change, discussed in detail in the PhD literature study (Janse van Rensburg, 2015). Some of the more important social theories informing the design of interventions are:

- Bourdieu's theories on cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) which explain the action of cultural capital in resisting the transformation of any field, be it a profession or an academic institution.
- Clegg's critical social theories (2011), which explore the interplay of different types of capital and alternative resources available to students with lower cultural capital.
- Jank's theories on the access paradox (2010), where role players in the academic world must develop a dominant voice in order to be taken seriously when representing marginalised positions.
- Current critical diversity literature (Davis & Steyn, 2012), based on Freire's theories on internalised identity constructs (1990), which explain how dominance and repression are hidden and replicated, how they affect people's interactions, and what it takes to undo them.

5.4   Changes introduced into the course

Strategic approach: As first-year teaching should ideally bridge gaps before students fall behind, the overall strategy was to pre-emptively address potential problems from multiple angles simultaneously, in the hope that something in the synergy of interventions would improve the outcomes. This is diagrammatically illustrated in figure 3.

Some of the basic strategies were

- to create social cohesion in the studio to facilitate peer learning
- to level the academic playing field by embedding the learning of contextual and academic skills in low-stakes projects before formal activities demanded them
- to embed all forms of additional learning in design assignments rather than setting additional exercises
- to validate all students as individuals, but offer correction and additional support collectively to all, without singling out those who needed it

- to equip students with an academic voice to enable them to express individual identity with authority
- to explain how learning happened, why teaching was offered in the way it was and how students could best benefit from the university environment
- to provide alternative pathways to the same learning outcomes
- to teach flexibly and responsively
- to reiterate required outcomes so that students could demonstrate that they had learned from unsuccessful attempts and gain confidence

New interventions: The interventions that were used to achieve these strategic aims fell into one or more of the following categories:

- Group activities where diversely-composed groups were confronted with challenges that could not be solved individually and were not dependent on prior learning
- Contextual Preparation – practically introducing students to the urban and architectural contexts and precedents
- Academic Preparation: introductory lectures and ongoing workshops on how to negotiate the academic environment
- Additional course content in the form of graphically well-illustrated lectures, available for reference afterwards
- More "open site" assignments in which students could choose to design in a context with which they were familiar and contextual peer learning happened as students presented their designs to the class
- Additional generic formative feedback to the whole class
- Additional tuition to the whole class on concepts with which a significant number of students were struggling, which also improved good students' mastery.
- Tutorials and workshops to establish design thinking or practical skills by guiding students step-by-step through new processes in small peer-discussion groups.
- Tuition through active rather than language-based learning wherever possible.
- Specific academic language tutoring embedded in design assignments
- Individual feedback to students on the skills that they needed to strengthen

Every educational task incorporated combinations of these interventions.

5.5 Cycles of change

The first cycle commenced in the first year that I taught the pre-existing course with expanded course content in the form of lectures. Workshops and tutorials were added in the second half of this cycle, more group activities were introduced in which groups were composed by staff rather than by students. In the second cycle, the teaching approach was adapted to include specific academic and contextual grounding during orientation week, scaffolded guidance on design processes and practical skills, and there was more emphasis on social integration. Some interventions that had additional staff and budgetary implications such as embedded language tutoring could only be introduced in the third cycle. By the third cycle the sequencing of different types of learning had been optimised. This version of the course was repeated for two more years, once led by a colleague and once by me. We observed a generalised improvement of learning outcomes throughout each class over the three cycles of change. Our interventions

Fig. 3 Representation of intervention points related to City et al's instructional core diagram (Janse van Rensburg, 2015, p. 187)
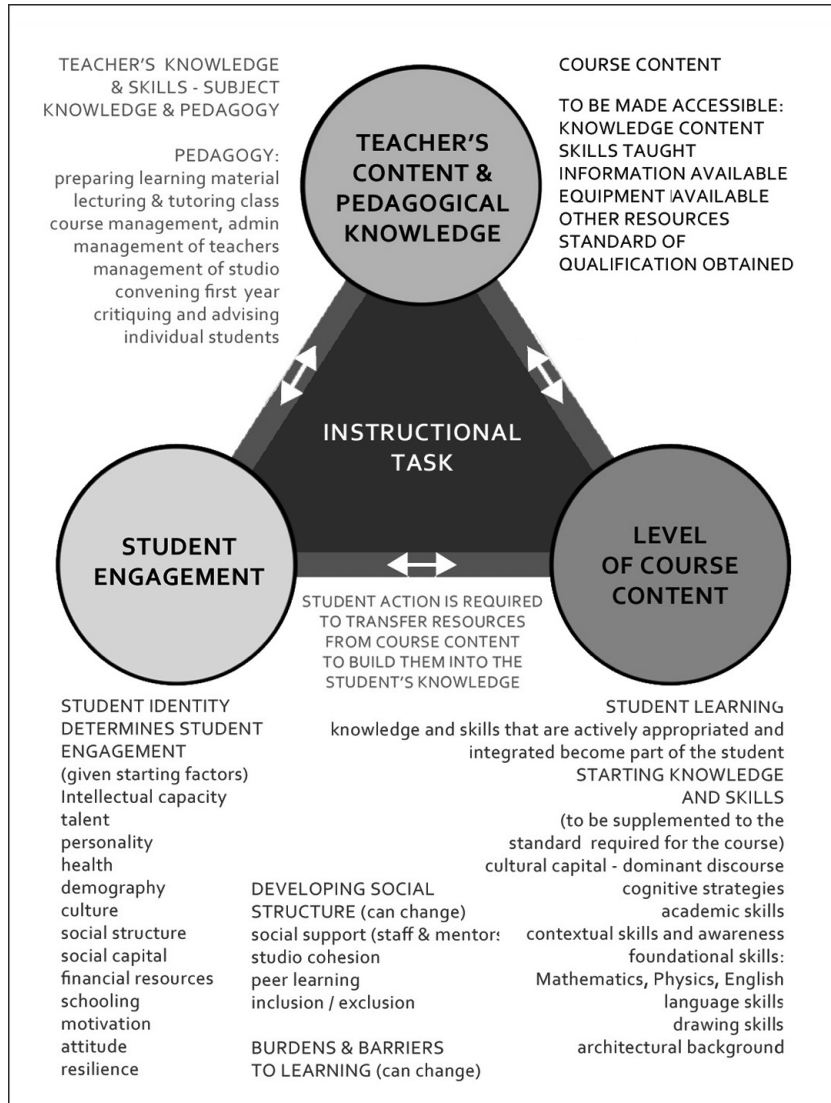
developed from "emergency intensive care" to recover from failure into the pro-active building of engagement and skills that avoided failure, and I gradually built a theorised understanding of the strategic timing of interventions.

6. The research component

The study to formally and retrospectively investigate the outcomes of these interventions moved the AR into a knowledge-generating mode. The detailed description of how this was designed to mitigate potential inaccuracies caused by the elapse of time between the teaching interventions and the study can be found in the PhD dissertation (Janse van Rensburg, 2015), but the broad methodology is outlined here.

6.1 Research parameters

Time scale: The outcomes of the three years (cycles) of interventions had to be assessed in relation to the preceding version of the course, and the outcomes of the final iteration had to be shown to be comparable with different students and teachers. It was also important to ascertain whether students had integrated this learning or had only been temporarily supported to perform better and relapsed afterwards. The three cycles of change were examined in detail, but within the context of student data covering the six-year period from the year preceding the first cycle to two years after the last cycle, which included those students' AD learning outcomes in subsequent years of study.

Changes in the demographic composition of the architecture student cohort were mapped over a ten-year period. Because of the political emphasis on broadening the racial and gender composition of the profession there was particular institutional interest in mapping student success in relation to race. The gender composition consistently mirrored that of the general population.

Research participants and study sample: The study population consisted of all students who had registered for first-year AD during the detailed study period (n=316). All these students contributed to the production of new knowledge, as they were active participants in discussions on their learning, and they were constantly testing the teaching interventions. Their assignments embodied evidence of how the teaching interventions had affected their learning. All these students were invited to contribute their insights in a retrospective survey, but only 259 students could be contacted, and only 54 of these responded.

The other group who were keen participants to transform pedagogy were the full cohort of the sessional staff tutors who co-taught in the first year AD studio during the study period.

Since they represented different ages, cultures and experiences, our discussions opened valuable insights. A 100 % sample participated in the retrospective focus-group interview and wanted to be informed of the study outcomes, but they were not available to become involved in further analysis.

The third group of research participants were teachers who had taught AD to the study population in subsequent years. They were all invited to a focus-group discussion and a representative group responded to the invitation, including all the studio leaders.

All relevant ethical permissions were obtained from the university and from individuals. The confidentiality of student identities was maintained.

6.2   Data collection

Existing documentation: There was university data (demographic data and academic outcomes) on all students who had been registered for AD during the study period. For every BAS applicant our programme had selection scores based on an equal weighting of school marks, set admissions exercises and interviews. For every student I had taught there were detailed marks for all assignments, records of attendance, reasons for absences or late submissions. There were photographic records of some assignments, personal e-mails and records of meetings about the problems that students encountered. There were anonymous student course evaluations with some responses to open questions, and there was feedback from external examiners.

From the teaching side, there was a complete set of course outlines and assignment briefs for every year of study. For the years when I taught, there were also full records of lectures, briefs and photographs for tutorial workshops, formal generic feedback to the class and individual feedback sheets for every assignment. There was a high pile of random documents including notes to self, notes on student's progress on studio registers, diary entries and numerous e-mails. It was a daunting task to distil this and find the essence.

Data collecting instruments: The formal data still to be obtained was feedback on students' experiences of learning in first-year AD, and teachers' learning about students' learning. What had students found challenging and why? What had been helpful or problematic? What results did the interventions produce?

This was obtained by inviting all students in the study population to respond to a semi-structured questionnaire on their experience of the first-year AD course after completion of the course. Lived experience and demographic variables that could potentially influence learning were covered by closed questions. The response sample was too small to be representative of each year-group's composition by race and by gender, but respondents included students of from all sub-groups and contexts. Although no statistical inferences could be made, the responses presented sufficient material for qualitative analysis to produce valid results.

The teacher feedback was obtained through two separate focus groups, with an opportunity before the interview to review course information sheets, to which participants added their own notes. Co-teachers in the first year AD course addressed: "What has been your experience of the outcomes of teaching in the ARPL1000 course over the past four years?", while design teachers in higher years focused on "What has been your experience of the outcomes of teaching in the ARPL1000 course over the past four years?".

6.3   Data processing

Reconstructing the missing research journal: The first step was to construct an accurate timeline onto which all existing data could be sorted, in order to recount what had happened during each teaching cycle. This deep immersion in the data prompted many recollections, but also served as an accuracy check. The first account was a writerly narrative. I tried not to interrupt the stream of memory by jumping to hindsight, inserting theory or trying to assign importance to events. The second writing of the narrative aimed to construct a "history of

significance (Carr, 1961)", structuring the account to describe teachers' learning about students' learning in each cycle, and relate this to theory. It was important to do this before opening the student questionnaire responses.

Constructing data sheets: In order to identify relational correlation between selection scores, learning outcomes, demographic variables and course iterations, without establishing causality (Light et al., 1990) all quantifiable institutional student data was compiled into a data sheet and cleaned. The sheets were constructed so that they could be sorted in different ways. When sorted chronologically, it enabled one to check the emerging qualitative narrative against the complete quantitative record over time and account for all outcome changes throughout the narrative.

6.4   Data analysis

Quantitative analysis: The student data sheets were analysed with the assistance of a statistician (Gaylard, 2013) to produce descriptive statistics. Many binary relationships were investigated to confirmed which correlations between demographic descriptors and learning outcomes merited further analysis. This also identified some discrepancies between students' self-perceptions and performance, e.g. Most of the first-language vernacular speakers who had received secondary schooling in English described themselves as first-language English speakers, but 50% of these respondents reported that they had great difficulty in understanding written assignment briefs.

Two useful indicators emerged that could be used for benchmarking:

1. Student selection scores are only an approximate measure of student potential, but despite these limitations, there was a weak positive statistical correlation between the selection scores and AD results of the study sample over the six-year period. (Janse van Rensburg, 2015, p. 114). In the first cycle it was clear that a significant cluster of Black students was performing below the trend line, and the majority of White students were above the trend line. By the third cycle, this had become a random distribution, and one could map changes to the ratio of average AD mark to average selection score in a group over learning cycles.
2. The assumption that the first-year AD mark should be a good indicator of a student's overall performance in this degree was strongly confirmed. (Janse van Rensburg, 2015, p. 31).

Qualitative analysis: All qualitative analysis followed the principles of finding recurring themes in the data and critically recognising underlying content as advocated by Charmaz for open coding analysis (ICQI, 2012) and in thematic content analysis (Van Zyl, 2014).

The focus group interview transcriptions were bulk-reduced by summarising, paraphrasing and extracting quotations, and then vertically analysed with reference to any written or graphic notes that participants made on the information sheets. The two vertical analyses were horizontally analysed without much overlap of themes although it was possible to integrate the data around student year groups.

The open question responses from course evaluation sheets were transcribed onto a spreadsheet where they were arranged per year of study and coded.

The open student questionnaire responses were on a survey-generated spreadsheet. Without consulting the demographic data, I first highlighted theme words and quotations in the open responses and then vertically analysed these by theme. I then examined the themes in relation to the demographic information and finally sorted the spreadsheet by year, by demographic groupings and by themes before returning to the narrative to code this by themes.

I finally did a horizontal analysis of narrative, questionnaire and focus group data from different perspectives and compiled analyses of my findings based on themes, barriers to learning, teaching years, racial categories and strategies for improvement. Any inconsistencies between different data compilations were interrogated, and findings were compared with theory until all inconsistencies could be accounted for. This process transformed our empirical learning into a theorised understanding of practice, resulting in what McNiff calls "living theories of practice" (2010). In Mayan's words, what one observes, learns and understands from practice allows one to build theory (Mayan, 2009).

6.5   Model extension

The relevance of the instructional core model (City et al., 2009) was strongly confirmed by my research, but I found that when a student's prior experience was not aligned with privileged academic expectations, students' attempts at engagement were often hampered by various barriers outside their control, including biased teacher expectations. Student engagement should therefore not be dismissed as students' own responsibility, but be facilitated by the course design.

My "living theory of practice" became an extension of the structural core model. The study confirmed that concurrent personal, social, academic and contextual learning can facilitate student engagement to create equitable access to architectural learning. Ideally, every educational task should be designed to produce learning on each of these levels. The timing of different types of learning is important to enable student engagement in time to meet the required outcomes.

City et al's instructional core model (2009) does not extend to the time dimension, and the learning from this study led to the development of an expanded transformational learning model in which the relationships between personal, social, academic and discipline-related learning could be conceptually represented over time, within the triad of teacher knowledge, student engagement and course content.

7.   Research outcomes

The study outcomes confirmed that the changes made to our teaching had successfully improved the imbalance of academic outcomes in the first-year AD course and produced better peer learning in a diverse studio. Over time it became clear that this improvement in learning continued during subsequent study years, and that a basis for good learning had been established. This validated both the methodology that was used to produce these changes and the new teaching theory that the study produced.

7.1   Action validity

This AR study confirmed that during the study period, the average class AD learning outcome (for all students who were assessed) improved from 58,3 % in the first cycle to 61,02 % in the third cycle and consistently improved after that as the same model was applied, despite a drop in the average selection scores over this period. The class improvement was greatest in groupings that were performing below their potential, and by the final cycle of teaching changes there was no longer a performance differential between different race groupings in the class (see figure 4), or a mid-year dip in assessment.

Fig. 4 Graph showing the equalisation of student learning outcomes in relation to selection scores between previously segregated groupings over the cycles of change (Janse van Rensburg, 2015, p. 329)
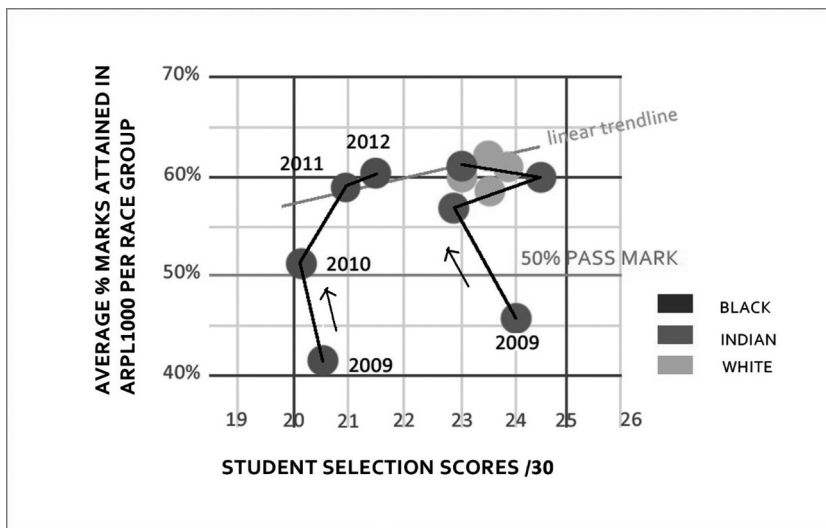
Throughput improved and far fewer students who were not meeting the course outcomes abandoned the course during the year. Over the three cycles the attrition fell from 16,5 % to 10,1 % to 3,8 %. The majority of students who had failed first-year AD and repeated the course performed in line with their potential at the second attempt and continued to do so in subsequent years. Only 2,8 % of students who successfully met the learning outcomes for first-year did not pass third-year AD at the first attempt, indicating that the embedded personal / social / contextual learning in first-year continued to sustain their architectural learning, and enabled them to develop a good foundation in AD.

A major contributor to the improvement in learning outcomes was the improvement in social cohesion in the studio and the resultant peer learning and support. Over the three cycles there was a decrease in the differential between the lowest and the highest marks in the class, a decrease in the number of students who failed the course and an increase in the class average mark for AD. By the end of each study year students were choosing to work in diverse groups when this was not enforced and this pattern continued in subsequent years. This is an indicator that these graduates are likely to be better equipped with the social understanding needed to design for a diverse society.

Many of the strategies developed in this study were disseminated and voluntarily implemented within the Department, Faculty and at architectural learning sites at other universities. Some relevant strategies were also adopted by other faculties in the university.

The disadvantage of the extended study was that by the time the research was published, the cutting edge of transformational teaching had moved on to decolonisation rather than creating epistemological access, but the principles embodied in the model and the usefulness of the methodology remain equally relevant.

It can therefore be concluded that this research has demonstrated outcome validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005), personal validity (McNiff, 2010, p. 14), democratic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005), transferability and generalisability.

7.2   Research validity

This brings us back to the initial question of whether it is possible to do a retrospective Educational AR study that meets the criteria of dependability/reliability and process validity if student feedback and certain types of evidence were not consistently collected at the time of the interventions.

During the course of this study a complete audit trail could be constructed of the retrospective narrative reconstruction process. The descriptive statistics provided a comprehensive quantitative description of the study period that substantially matched the qualitative analysis and theory, dispelling fears that a retrospective study might be invalidated by gaps or inaccurate recollections. There were multiple opportunities to subject this research to critical peer scrutiny through symposia and conference presentations while it was in progress, which generated agreement and interest in applying these methods in other contexts. This indicates that a rigorous retrospective study can demonstrate dependability (Mayan, 2009) process validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Newton & Burgess, 2008) and dialogical validity (Mayan, 2009; Newton & Burgess, 2008).

8.   Conclusions

8.1   Pedagogy

In a diverse post-colonial world where information is readily available, it is increasingly important in academic environments to facilitate collaborative learning and a context of social understanding in which learning can be applied. The extended learning model developed in this study not only produced improved academic outcomes, but also improved social learning. The improved understanding, trust and confidence that developed in and between teachers and students as a result of our collaboration to improve learning outcomes was more empowering to all the participants than the improvement in academic results.

8.2   The way forward

Although the strategies and interventions used in this study facilitated a considerable improvement in students' learning outcomes, they could not deeply address the issue of internalised identity constructs in students and teachers which continue to prevent students from reaching their full potential. Work on decoloniality has continued since the completion of this study, and the most important things that I learned from this study are that

- learning outcomes are only one of the symptoms of biases that have become normative and have to be addressed with self-critical integrity at a fundamental level in every field;
- AR is by its nature participatory, collaborative and validating, and facilitates delinking from established assumptions while investigating these issues
- the next steps in liberating students' potential must be taken even more collaboratively.

8.3   AR methodology

It is possible to do a valid retrospective AR study if the original action part of the process consisted of intentional cycles of improvement with sufficient participatory dialogue to inform them. The limitations outlined in section 3.2 can be overcome using alternative strategies to collect, compare and analyse data retrospectively.

Despite the disadvantage that not all students in the original study group could be reached for retrospective feedback, it is likely that the overall impact of teaching could be gauged more accurately by both students and teachers after some time had elapsed, and the most important learning emerged with greater clarity. For me, the painstaking reconstruction of the complete narrative, with hindsight and some post-theorisation, gave a more accurate view of gradual changes than feedback after specific interventions would have. This was particularly helpful in a complex, integrated and unfolding context.

What is particularly clear in retrospect is that ongoing participatory dialogue to inform and give feedback on the action process is far more important than formally documented surveys, and that no other research methodology could have adequately informed change of this complexity at this rate.

8.4   Overall conclusion

The dual questions to be addressed in this study were which changes in teaching could facilitate more equitable learning outcomes in a diverse class, and how AR methodology could be used to produce a valid retrospective study. These were both successfully resolved, as described in this paper, which is published in the hope that this learning may benefit those addressing similar challenges.

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Acknowledgements

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Healing assessment trauma: an experience of mutuality in Action Research

Reynaldo O. Cuizon

Abstract: Learning assessment is a pedagogical reality such as in teaching professional education courses with preservice education students. Assessment problems like horrifying and boring test papers must be addressed because these cause trauma to learners. Using an Action Research Method, I subjected my test materials to democratic critiquing and enhancement process, taking-into account the experiences of my learners and the viewpoints of my colleagues as my study participants. Said materials were utilized as my pedagogical action to address student assessment animosity. The results made me discern that though the contents of my test papers were aligned with the learning outcomes defined by the Commission on Higher Education, they were merely words and sentences in monotone appearance and thus, not eye-catching. Consequently, I crafted a Holistic Written Assessment Guide (HWAG) ensuring in test paper construction the pedagogical values of multiple intelligences, learning taxonomies, grammar review necessity, proper coverage and level of difficulty sequencing and marking, and time-number of items balance. Utilizing this new form and substance of my learning assessment material and engaging with it turned out to be liberating thus mutual healing to me as a transformed purveyor of education, to my students as healthy collaborators, creators and ultimate beneficiaries of learning, and to educators in the global environment as inspirers of democratic, equitable, and lifelong education. With this mutuality, this paper potentially enables leaders of nations to engage in the transformation of the pedagogical landscape.

Keywords: Healing from assessment trauma, test material enhancement, experience of mutuality, action research

Sanando el trauma de la evaluación: una experiencia de mutualidad en la Investigación Acción

Resumen: La evaluación del aprendizaje es una realidad pedagógica en contextos tales como la enseñanza de cursos de educación profesional para estudiantes de magisterio. Es importante hacer algo en relación con problemas de evaluación tales como los tests horripilantes y aburridos porque generan traumas a las personas en proceso de aprendizaje. Utilizando una metodología de Investigación Acción, expuse mis tests a un proceso de crítica democrática y mejora, considerando las experiencias tanto de las personas en proceso de aprendizaje como de mis colegas. Dichos materiales constituyeron mi acción pedagógica para gestionar la animosidad de los estudiantes ante la evaluación. Los resultados me hicieron ver que, aunque los contenidos de mis tests estaban alineados con los resultados definidos por la Comisión de Educación Superior, eran simplemente palabras y frases de apariencia monótona y, en consecuencia, no llamaban la atención. Consecuentemente, preparé una Guía Holística para la Evaluación Escrita (GHEE), asegurándome que los tests tenían en cuenta los valores ped-

agógicos de la multiplicidad de inteligencias, las taxonomías de aprendizaje, la necesidad de revisar la gramática, cobertura y nivel de dificultad adecuadas de las secuencias y puntuaciones, y el equilibrio entre el tiempo disponible y el número de ítems. Utilizar estas nuevas forma y substancia de mi material de evaluación del aprendizaje y comprometerme con ello resultó ser un proceso liberador y mutuamente curativo, tanto para mi como educador, como para mis estudiantes y colaboradores, creadores y últimos beneficiarios del aprendizaje. También puede ser liberador para educadores en el contexto global que quieran ser inspiradores de una educación a lo largo de la vida democrática e igualitaria. Con esta mutualidad, este artículo podría, potencialmente, ayudar a los líderes de distintas naciones a comprometerse en la transformación del panorama educativo.

Palabras clave: curación del trauma de la evaluación, mejora de materiales para tests, experiencia de mutualidad, Investigación Acción

Rationale

Learning can be traumatic. Conversely, trauma hinders learning. Learners, either in micro or macro classrooms, often succumb to learning assessment trauma. Neither they nor their teachers can face it alone and not even the world can impose what the curative measures are. The healing action tried out in this study was mutually experienced by the learners, the teacher, and the educators in the global learning environment radiating with the sustainable development goals for education.

This study explores on what shapes the assessment trauma in learners and what mechanism is adaptable to address it. It appreciates the insights of the teacher and students being both instigators and beneficiaries of learning emerging from their assessment trauma and sharing healing experiences. Correspondingly, their healing is imperative to the attainment of the global targets for quality education. Hence, this study does not only determine assessment trauma as a classroom problem and create a curative response to reverse its devastating effect on learners, but also attempts to spread the healing experience instigated by democratic action in a minute educational classroom to a traumatic global educational environment.

In drawing out the viewpoints and insights emerging from experiencing the problematic learning assessment, from observing how it shatters learners, and acknowledging the healing effect of Holistic Written Assessment Guide undertaken as intervention, this study applied and consequently attested the value and usefulness of so-called first, second and third person dynamism of Action Research. In this venture, the dynamics of mutuality is articulated along the processes of diagnosing the problem, action planning, taking-action, evaluating the action, and specifying learning. These processes were undertaken by 37 students as direct study participants, the teacher as the researcher, and 3 invited co-teachers as process observers.

Diagnosing the Problem of Assessment Trauma

Teaching is healing!
- Paolo Freire, 1998; 1996

As a teacher of education professional courses, I used to merely prepare and implement learning assessment apart from evoking thoughts and values on relevant topics of the course. I never used to provide major attention on the monitoring and assessment aspects of teaching specifically assessing my own learning assessment. Since knowledge on assessment criteria and process are necessary factors of test performance (Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003), I have always ensured that assessment orientation was undertaken prior to the examination proper. However, I thought doing test orientation was enough until I overheard two students complain severely about examination. Even if they were not in my class, I felt guilty for not having been keen about drawing out feedback about the test that I prepared and administered.

Disturbed by this imperfection, I was moved to explore related research findings. I then found that teachers should care about assessment materials as way to carry out the pedagogical role of motivating students (Wentzel, 1997). As purveyors of knowledge, I agree that teachers are expected to revisit every time the essence of the mission to care and create meaningful efforts towards changing the life of the learners (O'Connor, 2008) and be immersed into the healing function of education by being sensitive to the responsibility of identifying what is ailing in the learning environment and to democratically sort it out with the students (Freire, 1998).

One learning environment issue which caught my attention was the written examination. As I have observed in various occasions both in and outside classrooms, students were not excited about examinations. Instead of delight and elation with it, they had fears and discomforts. When I shared this observation with my colleagues, I heard similar predicaments. Thus, curiosity to investigate this phenomenon was triggered.

As I explored the phenomenon, I conversed with students and imparted queries related to their experience of examination anxiety. Consequently, I heard various and even worse remarks.

Basta magpadulong na gani ang exam schedule, ma-stress gyud ko. Dili gyud ko makatulog og mayo. Tapos kung makamata sa tungang gabii, maglisud ko tulog og balik tungod kay maglagot kay exam na pud. Mahadlok ko mabagsak ko kay unsa na lang isulti sa uban… sa akong mga parents. Murag mangurug ko maghuna-huna.
When the schedule of the examination is approaching, I feel stressed. I can't sleep well. If I wake up in the middle of the night, I find it hard to go back to sleep because I hate that it's examination time again. I am afraid to fail for what would others say… especially my parents. I tremble just thinking about it.

Many students disliked, hated, and were care-free about examination. They felt that they were "obliged" to take examination for course completion evidence and tuition fee collection purposes. They commented that given an option, they would not engage in written examination.

Ako wala koy labot anang exam oy. Basta, dili ko excited ana nga butang. Take-take lang ko para lang gud makahuman kog eskwela. Kung naa pa lay laing eskwelahan nga walay exam-exam didto gyud ko moeskwela. Papili-on ko sa mag exam or maghimo project, didto na lang ko sa project kay sa maghawoy imong kamot sinulat ug makaluya sigi huna-huna. Ang isa ka oras murag isa na katuig.
I don't care about exam. Honestly, I'm not excited about it. I just engage with it in order to earn a degree. If only there is a school with no exams, I would enroll there. If given the chance to choose between taking exam or making a

project, I opt with the latter rather than getting my hands exhausted by writing and my mind drained. One-hour exam is like a one whole year undertaking.

When I delved into the core of this issue, I discovered that students perceived examination as scary because they were driven by the fears of being judged especially on their intellectual performance, of foreseeing possible negative results, of the possibility of being embarrassed and wasting money, and of starting from scratch if the test turned out to be unfavorable. For them, examination is tantamount to pressure of meeting the expectations of others, and to the obligation to explain the reason for failing. It is identical to exasperation especially with the long, extensive and time demanding actual assessment activity where they need to endure cramping hands for writing too much, and of sweating a lot for recalling and analyzing the possible answers. It is perceived as difficult thus not entertaining, but it entails a demanding nerve-wrecking preparation. It is a memory-squeezing exercise that is mentally draining, and it is associated with the dislikable teacher, thus hard to take.

Among the reasons that the students revealed for hating the examination was the boring and horrible test paper. For them, it is a static and rigid material causing them a vomiting-like feeling. They feel that it leads to an "all work, no play" scenario that often results to low exam performance. One student recalled…

Giluod na gyud ko anang test papers. 18 years na ko nag-agwanta ana since grade 1. Kung pwede pa lang mograduate na ko ugma para makalikay na ko ani nga butang. Pahirap. I don't find it nga makalipay nga himuon. Mao nga kabalo ko kini ang hinungdan nga dili mayo akong grado.
I'm sick of test papers. I have been trying to survive it for 18 years since I was in first grade. If I can only graduate tomorrow right away to get rid of it. It's a burden. I don't find it pleasurable to engage in. I know it's the reason of my unfavorable academic performance.

This reminded me of the assertion that test items are considered a factor in test performance (Teasdale & Owen, 2005) and that test paper anxiety exerts a significant stable and negative impact on academic performance measures (Cassady & Johnson, 2002).

These negative descriptions of test papers are like a double-edged sword that hit my conscience and pierced my inner vulnerability. The questions on how my students regard and feel about my test papers, and how I can possibly help avert the unfavorable views and sentiments of the learners about test papers continued to haunt my values as a person and my vows as a teacher. Carrying these loads on my shoulders, I began to suspect that other students not in my class are undergoing similar "test paper trauma". It is a classroom reality that is likewise experienced on a global scale that instigates the United Nations to continuously aim and toil for equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG, U., 2019). Any unhealthy classroom practice that strips the students of meaningful learning opposes the UN 2030 agenda of respect for human rights and dignity, and justice and equality (Desa, 2016). Such target can also be attained through the establishment of scientific community and building knowledge-based societies (Colglazier, 2015). In short, the student assessment predicament, my agitated teaching profession, and the global sustainable development concern of nations on education, made me pursue my Action Research from diagnosing the root causes of traumatic learning assessment as a disease in education up to figuring out an appropriate antidote to heal the nauseated individuals in my own learning environment, and in every nation as a macro classroom.

Action Planning in Exploring Democratic Inquiry

Democratic inquiry improves practice.
- Frabutt et al., 2008

I believe that teaching is indeed healing – a principle that can be realized through democratic process. Hence, as a teacher confronted with a potential unhealthy condition in an examination environment, I wanted to do something in order to eradicate if not lessen the learners' animosity on test papers. I discussed with my colleagues the possible mechanisms in achieving this goal. From among the various suggestions I received, I liked the idea of improving my test papers based on the experiences and suggestions of the people I engaged with during examination. I had an inkling that engaging in an improved test material would turn out to be a therapeutic activity to mend a devastated learner. Thus, I was enticed to make a diagnosis right within my own classroom as my laboratory, to use my own test papers as my apparatus, and to engage my own students and colleagues as my samples (study participants).

In realizing this, I found Action Research as the most appropriate method to use as it addresses a practical problem in the workplace, tries out a strategy, engages colleagues and clients as important sources of information, counts in one's own learning emerging from one's own experience of implementing the strategy, and improves work climate by modifying work strategy (Stringer, 2008). I became eager to engage in and find how action research could help me inquire assessment related problems encountered in my classroom, describe realizations on its connections with the teaching and learning performance, and create and explain possible solutions. I was convinced it involves and brings excitements and joys among those involved being a living research theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Its principles radiate the magnitude of the essence of change, reflection, participation, inclusivity, sharing, understanding, repetition, and the sense of practice and community (Stringer, 2004). Finally, by teaching education students, I realized how important doing Action Research is in the teacher education program (Hine, 2013).

Seeing the appropriateness of such method, I went through the process of diagnosing the problem, action planning, taking action, evaluating, and specifying learning as basic steps of Action Research (O'Brien, 1998). I sought answers to the following questions from the study participants and process observers: What are the current manifestations of assessment trauma among students? What are the feedbacks of my students and colleagues about my assessment material? What are their suggestions to enable them to like, admire, and enjoy my assessment material? What can be the new essence (substance and form) of my assessment material based on their suggestions? These were asked to evoke comments on the test paper such as its appearance, construction, organization and others.

I read relevant sources and interviewed students. In the planning, I asked pieces of advice on how to evoke the feedbacks of the learners. I prepared my assessment material the usual way which later I subjected to critiquing. I utilized purposive sampling particularly convenient sampling (Marshall, 1996) because after all I had my class as my captured study participants, and my colleagues and myself as process observers and secondary participants. With purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016), I was able to choose the group, the individuals within it, and their location as all important aspects in understanding the study with its major and principal events and occurrence.

In the analysis of the information, I evoked the experiences via experiential-theoretic transition model (Piantanida & Garman, 2009) integrated with the use of lateral-vertical analysis technique. Thus, my entire class, my selected colleagues and I went through four phases of concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active trying out of the material. In writing the result, I followed the *emic* style (Patton, 2002) of reflection. I entered-into the world and the culture of the owners of the experience.

While analyzing and writing of the thoughts and feelings about the assessment materials and of the experience of the learners, I also encountered my self. I realized my inner vulnerabilities. I wanted focus on the world of the learners. However, it was the idea on *authenticity of the first-person practice* in Action Research (Coghlan, 2008) which gave me the courage to spontaneously reveal also my own story of healing. I viewed myself not as something at a distance from the subject matter being explored to but one within. I was convinced that if I truly figure out my difficulties in accepting the criticisms of my learners and the healing I encountered from within, then I would fully grasp the struggles of my learners and then appreciate deeply the value of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations for quality education.

Moreover, in this Action Research, I followed the trustworthiness requirement in qualitative research namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Fenton & Mazuwelics, 2008). I ensured credibility through the conduct of simultaneous small group and series interviews in order that prior shared viewpoints and standpoints are confirmed with the emerging ones. I further ensured it by giving adequate time and careful interactions with the study participants, detailed descriptions of the learning environment, and the triangulation of the data shared by the different FGDs. In terms of ensuring transferability, first I came up with detailed explanation of the comments and suggestions of my study participants using the most appropriate words and more understandable thoughts, views and emotions.

In terms of adhering to dependability, I conveyed the important details of the information shared vis-à-vis existing concepts, theories and principles that I had encountered in my readings of the literatures and research findings. Furthermore, I gave my strong confidence in the integrity, sincerity and honesty of my study participants whom I intentionally made part of obtaining the general experience of utilizing my test materials. Their contribution was not shaded by interest to gain higher marks because it was made clear from the start of the research that viewpoints would not be recompensed. Lastly, I ensured confirmability by way of keeping the original transcripts of those reported observations and discussed feedbacks during the focus group discussions, those recorded in the journals of my colleagues and mine during observations, and those emerging from the individual interviews. I also audit trails to ensure that the study is rigorously undertaken and accomplished (Wolf, 2003).

Finally, I upheld ethical actions by undertaking free prior informed consent and allowing my students and co-teachers to use the vernacular, ensured them of confidentiality such that their names do not appear in the manuscript. I apportioned in the consent form a space where the study participants affixed their signatures indicating their acceptance of the agreement (Creswell, 1998).

Taking action to Unearth Experiences Linked to Assessment Trauma

Participation is a freedom of expression.
- Flanders, 2013

After reflecting on various possibilities and planning how to gather the information needed, I then took the actual action. I kept in mind that participant observation is a vigorous data collection method (Kawulich, 2005) especially in qualitative type of research (Patton, 1990) with which Action Research is strongly identified (Stringer, 2008). Being aware of this, I was confident to gather relevant information through observation technique. I applied such technique even prior to the examination proper when I observed the students' reactions especially every time that I reminded them of the test schedule, contents, coverage, and the type.

My students and the test paper as both parts of the learning environment were the sources of data and object of the study. After all, Action Research as a value-driven transformative process aims to effect change within an environment with the active observation and involvement of the researcher (Cunningham, 2008).

When the examination time came, the students arrived seemingly in various dispositions. As I informed them ahead, the teachers I invited to sit in were welcomed in the class. They helped me observe the learning environment such as the distribution and retrieval of the test papers. We observed the students, watched and scrutinized their body language and their facial expressions. In order to ensure proper and accurate recollection of observed information, each of us kept a personal journal.

After the test, I asked my students if they had noticed anything about the test materials including the construction of the test items both format and substance. Few of them raised hands, others uttered few remarks. Thus, we agreed together that in the following class session, we would discuss their observations about the test paper. On the other hand, I requested my colleagues who sat in the class to share their observations both the actions and the content of the test papers. I emphasized to them that we needed to allow ourselves to be drawn into the meaning of every text in relation with the appearance of the whole material. I also critically reviewed the material and added my findings in my journal.

When the next class meeting came, I organized the students into three groups. One had males, and two others had females and mixed members. I posted my research guide questions on the board, projected the test paper on screen, and provided the opportunity for the students to critique and discuss. I went around, observed and wrote descriptions of their reactions which I inserted in my journal. After the FGD, I requested each group to report their feedbacks in the plenary using any language they felt comfortable with. We interacted and unified on the points raised and presented. After the activity, I collected the written reports from students and the journals from my colleagues. The succeeding days turned out to be fruitful interactions between me and each of my colleagues. I took separate notes of the feedback I gathered from them.

Evaluating the Encounter with the Assessment Material

Leadership is an outcome of humility
- Morris, Brotheridge and Urbanski, 2005

I remembered how my students reacted on the test papers. I admit that I felt uncomfortable with those reactions. During group reporting I was knocked by sarcasm. I noticed some who made faces and insulting smiles. Some students looked at each other as if confirming the negativities of the test materials they observed that corroborated with what were articulated by the presenters. There were terms uttered to describe their thoughts that were not gentle to my hearing.

I was truly hurt when I heard that aside from dis-alignment of the content and items to learning outcomes, my students saw nothing in my test papers except words, paper, sentences, questions – things which are typical of any test papers they encountered in exam after exam. In short, there was nothing new and exciting about my test papers. One student openly reacted after the group presentation saying that…

Wala gyud koy napansin sa test paper gawas nga papel sya nga nay mga pangutana. Kana lang. Mao lang man gyud ni ang makita sa test paper di ba? Sukad grade one pa ko mao ni gyud ni akong makita, wa nay lain – questions, questions, questions. Puro questions.
I did not notice anything in the test paper except that it's a paper material containing questions. That's it. This is what a test paper is, right? Since I was in grade one, this is what I see – questions, questions, questions. Nothing else.

Another student spoke in relation to such comment and laughed outed very loud. She said…

Gawas sa questions, naa koy nakita… nay duha ka colors, itum ug puti. Puti ang papel ug itum, ang ink.
Aside from questions, I saw something… there are two colors, black and white. The paper is white, and the ink is black.

One of the things spoken out by one presenter was that majority of the items in the test paper was merely at remembering level and some items were grammatically defective. While the idea was being shared, I overheard another one from the seat who conveyed softly saying…

Bitaw tama gyud. Halos tanan items makasakit og ulo kay murag ginapuga imong utok sa pag huna-huna ug pag-remember sa daghan kayo nga mga lessons. Makaluya gyud ang test oy.
That's right. Almost all items trigger headache because it's like your brain is squeezed a lot in order to recall the many lessons. The test is draining.

All the rest of the common ideas presented by the different groups were about the test coverage, organization of items, markings according to level of difficulty, and the practicality to finish all items on time. They shared that the test paper included topics that were not discussed in the class in the previous weeks before the examination was taken up, and some very difficult items were presented ahead which ate up so much time of their time before they proceeded to the simpler questions. They also highlighted that easy and difficult items were unfairly assigned with equal marks, and there were too many items vis-à-vis allotted time for them to fully accomplish the test.

The succeeding moment became more shameful. I read texts flashed on the Powerpoint slides almost common to all presenters regarding ideas about learners' differences, level of difficulty of the questions, assigning marks, grammar problem, and request to consider the length of time. One student specifically said…

Dili man ta pareho tanan og pamaagi ug interest sa pag-learn di ba? Dapat pud unta ni hatagan og pagtagad sa exam. Mao daghan ang dili makahuman sa pag-answer. Maabtan na lang sa time. Mubo pud ang oras tapos nay mga pangutana nga dili dayon masabtan kay mali ang grammar.

Not all have the same way and interest in learning, right? This concern must also be considered in the exam. That is why many cannot finish answering the test. They are caught up by time. The time limit provided for the test is too short then there are questions so difficult to decipher because of grammar problem.

Another one looked at me and had this said …

Sir, mas mayo unta kung gamay-gamayan ang gidaghanon sa items. Timbangon gyud kung matubag ba namo ang mga pangutana sulod sa gihatag nga time. Basin gibase nimo sa imong kakayahan Sir kay master na man ka. Naa pa gyuy naapil nga questions pero dili namo mahinumduman kanus-a nato ni na-discuss sa klase.

Sir, it might be good if you reduce the number of items. Weigh it over whether the test is doable in a given time. You might have just based it from your level being knowledgeable of the topic. Additionally, there are included questions which we could hardly remember the occasion when they were tackled in the class.

My students prompted me that I should have considered diversity of their individual learning styles and general thinking capability as a class when preparing the test items. They suggested that test items should be in different degree of difficulty and organized from easy to difficult level. They pointed out that grammar problem should have been avoided or at least lessened if I asked the assistance of grammar experts. They demanded that undiscussed subject matter should be excluded, and that those less tackled get fewer number of items than those discussed more and longer. They proposed that difficult questions would be given higher marks. Finally, they hoped that number of items must just be doable within the examination period.

Hearing all those remarks made me realize how low was my interest to enhance my skills in assessment vis-à-vis students' needs. I confess that in the past, I assessed students for the sake of complying with the requirements of my job as a teacher. I assessed them only because I needed to measure their intellect vis-à-vis the subject matter but never their affection on assessment per se. I assessed them to see their improvement but never about how I could ever improve myself in advancing their level of learnings both in terms of capability and motivation. I assessed them without thinking of the impact of my assessment on their self-confidence. Those remarks I paid attention to also made me size up my capacity to accept criticism and suggestion as a person, and my willingness to change my practices as a teacher. Above this, I was reminded of multiple intelligences and of Bloom's taxonomy modified and asserted by Anderson and Krathwohl (Wilson, 2016). Indeed, the six cognitive taxonomies were topics we discussed in the course, yet I failed to apply them in my assessment materials. Further, I was drawn back to the values of humility to submit a work for peer review and of justice to reward abilities to perform harder tasks. I also recalled an article stating that the human brain tends to be attentive actively only for 45 minutes. Thereafter, it needs rest to regain concentration strength. The amount of time an individual can remain focused on a task like answering a test without becoming distracted is referred to as attention span. Students who extend beyond their attention span tend to commit more errors, create less, and perform low. Recently, researchers found that the average attention span of American learners dropped to 20, 10 and even 5 minutes (Kohn, 2014). Low attention span is caused by too much exposure to modern technologies (Postman, 2011). The dropping of attention can be true to countries like the Philippines since new millennium learners have something in common – exposure to technologies (Pedró, 2006).

After all the deliberations, I went home with a blissful heart. I brought with me the sincerities of my students, the remarks which I considered relevant information that I needed,

and the appreciation of some that the test paper at least had elicited efforts to think about and recall the lessons. I felt then that I (as teacher) enhanced the leadership in me sculpted by humility – something which is a key to success particularly in making my followers (the students) admire, respect and support, and keep on (Eragula, 2015). I was also humbled that in a way, my class and I experienced the mutuality to start a little action, like a mustard seed creating great wonders in the fulfillment of global concern for quality education.

Specifying Learning out of the Experience

Continual learning is reassuring.
- Mankowitz et al, 2018)

Going back to the time before the examination day, it seemed to me that nobody was interested in how the actual test would be undertaken and how the test papers would look like. I noticed that the students were cold about it. During the examination proper, I saw frowning faces and uneasy body movements such as scratching of hair, pulling of shirts, looking around and outside the windows. There were faces that were emotionless and uncaring. Most conveyed confusions, frustrations, and exasperation.

During the focus group discussions, while looking into and extracting the feedback about the test papers, I noticed that a lot of my students expressed excitement for being part of the process and for sharing their thoughts and critiques. They were very happy discussing within their respective groups. During the reporting, they confirmed their experiences and reactions with the viewpoints that were raised by their group members and even by those from others. One said…

Lipay kaayo ko. I don't know sa uban. Kay nahatagan ko og chance nga mahimo kong kabahin sa interest ni sir sa pag-improve sa iyang test paper. Feeling nako naay bili akong kaugalingon.
I am very happy. I don't know about the others. This is because I was given the chance to become part of sir's interest in improving his test paper. I feel that I have value as a person.

In undergoing the process, I felt happy observing my students but also anxious about their feedbacks. Though feedbacks were focused on my test papers yet somehow, they were also pointed at my limitations as a teacher. Nevertheless, I tried to be composed. I had prepared myself for that moment and I was convinced that criticism was good for my own improvement and development as an education practitioner. Most importantly, I learned that test papers can instigate trauma among students. And if teachers like me continue to be blind on this mistake, the trauma worsens. I confess, my students have opened my eyes by fairly and candidly sharing their thoughts, feelings, and suggestions for my pedagogical action.

Subsequently, I improved my test paper. I kept the value of alignment with the learning outcomes, however I made it already based on multiple intelligences principle where types of questions were spread to attract the musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, and logical-mathematical inclined and the bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic types of learners. For instance, I already added various drawings, caricatures, logical illustrations, abstract symbols, and pictures in some test items. I applied topic integration strategy where I contextualized certain topics on the course "Child and Adolescent

Development" with nature, songs and music, physical movements, and the value of relationship with self and others.

In addition, I already seriously applied in my test materials the principles of table of specification (TOS). It means that questions are constructed in different levels of taxonomy namely, remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. I arranged them from easy to thought-stimulating level. I also provided specific points corresponding with the degree of difficulty of each question. Moreover, I already sought the assistance of grammar experts. I requested colleagues in the field of Communication Arts and Linguistics to go over every test item. I enjoyed listening to their remarks after the review because at the same time I was expanding a lot my horizon on grammar and language construction.

Furthermore, I double-checked the test items. I controlled the number of items vis-à-vis the bulk of topics discussed and balanced this with length of time available. I came up with less number but quality test items. For instance, in the prelim examination, from one hundred items in a span of one hour as previously practiced, I reduced the items to only twenty-five.

In short, I considered the important pedagogical values in the revision and improvement of the test materials namely, multiple intelligences, learning taxonomies, grammar reviews, markings corresponding to degree of difficulty, proper coverage, and balancing of time and number of items. Putting all these pedagogical values together prompted me to conceptualize an examination paper template which I called Holistic Written Assessment Guide (HWAG).

Illustration 1: Guide in allocating the type of test items

HWAG is a template that guides the arrangement of test questions drafted and assigned with specific corresponding score depending on level of complexity and difficulty. It values the diversity of learners' intelligence and their learning types. It makes it easy for me to plot the different type of items to measure the student learning.

In addition, I have developed the simple mathematical formula to determine how many items are to be allocated for specific topics tackled in the class. It is the number of hours taught divided by the total number of hours of all the topics covered; and the quotient is multiplied to the number of target items. The target total number of items depends on the number of total

hours covered. Since the institution I was in requires a total of 80 hours coverage for the whole term and a sixty-minute examination thereafter with a total of one hundred test items, I used such ratio in determining how many items I would need to prepare within a duration specified.

Illustration 2: Formula on deriving the number of test item

Formula: $Ti : Hd : At$

Symbol	Meaning	University Standard for Final Exam
Ti	total item	Not less than 100 items
Hd	number of hours covered	Not less than 80 hours
At	allotted time for the test	Not less than 60 minutes
n	number items to be prepared	(have to be determined)
x	Amount of time for the test	(have to be determined)

Example: Prelim exam (what must be the total number of items and time)
Given: the number of hours covered is 20

Step 1: (finding the items)

$$100 : 80 = n : 20$$
$$80 n = 2,000$$
$$80 n / 80 = 2,000 / 80$$
$$n = 25 \text{ items}$$

Step 2: (Finding the exam time)

$$100 : 60 = 25 : x$$
$$100 x = 1,500$$
$$100 x / 100 = 1,500 / 100$$
$$x = 15 \text{ minutes}$$

I realized that undergoing the test revision and improvement process of my test papers has strengthened my compassion for learners and my passion for teaching. Seeing the beauty of thprocess that we have undergone together as well as its corresponding outcomes have motivated me to re-examine every new and modified test materials. Perfection might not be achievable but chasing perfection is certainly doable and enjoyable – bringing about excellence in me as a practitioner and in my students as my pedagogical equals. Living out this culture enables myself to contribute something to the institutional continual improvement. After all, I am convinced that teachers must be part of the so-called reflective institution (Biggs, 2001).

As my students opened my eyes, mutually we were cured from the psychological burden of test trauma. I was informed that the encounter of my students with my new test papers turned out to be an inspiring fulfilment for them. In the succeeding class sessions, it was already them who excitingly reminded me of the examination timetable. Unlike before, I was the one who kept reminding them to study hard every time examination period was approaching. I remember an instance I came across few of my students at the lobby, one asked which was affirmed by others said…

Sir, maghatag na ka daan og exam ugma? Excited na gud mi mo-take sir – ginaabangan gyud namo atong test kay malipay mi.
Sir, are you going to administer the test ahead tomorrow? We are already very excited to take it sir – we always look forward to it as it makes us happy.

After our short conversations, I walked with a cheerful heart. The positive gestures that my students used manifested a restored learning interest once shattered by unhealthy test materials.

This time, I already saw smiles in their faces while taking the test. This change in the classroom atmosphere from negativity to alacrity during examination awakened my enthusiasm to look forward to examination days. I was elated with the revelation of many who felt excited to see the appearance and read the contents of my test papers. After the examination activity, majority wanted to bring home copies of the test papers – behaviors which were non-existent in my examination environment prior to this research.

Sir, pwede ba nga dili na iuli ang test paper, ang filled-out answer sheets na lang among iuli? Amoon na lang ning test paper, pwede?
Sir, is it okay not to return anymore the test paper, only the filled-out answer sheets? We can bring home the test paper, can't we?

Above all these, I noticed how the learning performance of my students increased in the succeeding grading periods and I received priceless appreciations. One student said…

Sure ko nga ang pagtaas sa akong grado tungod gyud sa naunsa ko pagka-attract sa lahi nga appearance sa test paper ug sa ka-klaro sa mga questions. Kung sa una ma-tense ko samtang nag take sa exam kay nag apas ko sa oras, sa karun kay though paspas akong utok nga naga huna-huna sa answers pero naga enjoy ko. Murag, kulangan pa ko kay gusto pa ko mo-answer ug naa pa koy extra nga time gamay. Sa una, bug-at kaayo ang feeling inig gawas sa classroom after sa exam. Pero karun gaan kaayo ang feeling. Naga-discuss pa mi sa akong mga classmates sa among nakita ug nabasa sa test paper. Usually after sa test matulog dayon ko tungod sa kakapoy. Salamat gyud sir, dili na ko stressed before ug during sa exam, ug dili na pud ko drained pagkahuman.
I am sure that the increase of my grade was also influenced by how I was attracted by the unique appearance of the test paper and the clarity of the questions. If before I felt tense while taking the test because I was catching up the time, however this time although my mind still intensely thinking of the answers but at the same time I was enjoying. Somehow, I felt wanting to answer more because I still have little time left. Before, the feeling was so heavy getting out of the room after the test. But now the feeling is so light. My classmates and I still discussed what we saw and read in the test paper. Usually after the test I slept right away because of exhaustion. Thank you, sir, I don't feel stressed before and during the examination, and I don't feel drained after.

Seeing this mutuality transpired, I contemplated that beyond my responsibility of making teaching-learning alive, enjoyable and meaningful, I have a hidden task as a teacher to animate justice, mutual respect, and democracy within everyone in the micro-society I am working in. This idea adds to my views of how Action Research is as a tool to make this task happen. Astoundingly, our mutuality transcends from our level. One student optimistically articulated his heart out…

Kini nga kalipay tungod sa kabag-ohan nga atong nasinati motakud gyud ni sa uban ug sa umaabot nga panahon ky mahimo man ta mga teachers puhon. Magtudlo ta nga wala nay bagahe sa dala-dala. Kita ang magdala sa mayo nga edukasyon – something nga makat-onan sa uban gikan sa ato hangtud nga mo-spread ni hinay-hinay sa bigger society, sa world.
This joy in us caused by healing that we experienced will contaminate others and in the next generations because we will become teachers someday. We teach without that baggage on our shoulder. We are catalyst of good education – something that can be learned by others from us spreading slowly to the bigger society, the world.

When I recalled, I saw that my entire experience of doing this Action Research was not easy. I painstakingly dared the risk of possibly causing demise by inadvertently undergoing an erroneous method of treatment to test paper anxiety. I was internally devastated when I had to swallow my pride amidst dreadful criticisms. Nevertheless, I redeemed myself upon seeing how the patients inside my own classroom have recuperated from assessment trauma and regained the courage and enthusiasm to engage in the examination process. They also reversed their negativity against test papers. The entire event was a grueling experience, but its fruits contributed to the establishment of a happy learning environment in my classroom at long last.

Moreover, the feedbacks of my students have fueled my dynamism in the teaching profession, and their recovery and healing became my consolation and inspiration. While I helped cure the test paper anxiety disease of my students through Action Research therapy, I was also healed as a teacher. The whole experience had opened my eyes and made me a new educator, a new person. I was healed from being oblivious and uncaring to being observant and sensitive to learner needs; from being carefree about test papers to being receptive to learner criticisms. I became eager to enhance not just the 'Child and Adolescent Development' test papers but also of all the courses I am handling.

I was relieved from the symptoms of insensitivity on the assessment trauma of my learners. My values and interest in improving learning through a healthy assessment was improved. Now I am resounding the healing memories in my heart because the students made me different from who I was. I avow that teaching and researching are inseparable, and both heal not just the learners, but more importantly, the teacher. I am convinced that when teachers study the pedagogical actions that they undertake in their learning environment, they will turn disaster into bliss – an opportunity that alter the learning from demotivation to passion. In this study, I enhanced my assessment practice and materials from mediocrity to quality. And in such action, at the very least, I felt that I helped heal the examination trauma of the learners.

Holding firmly on the aphorism of doing Action Research and learning from the results of this study, I became more mindful of the teacher's responsibility to enhance test materials. The lessons of this research taught me a lot of implications for my pedagogical practice such as promoting action research, and utilization of Holistic Written Assessment Guide (HWAG). I am now advocating policy formulation following the mathematical formula in determining total numbers of test items and amount of time as my simple way of paying back the generosities of my students and colleagues in mending examination trauma.

Apart from my encounter with the transformative healing experience of my learners, I also felt confident that the learning of the teachers influenced by this study is compelling and 'contagious' Such marvel leads eventually to the termination of the legacy of assessment trauma through the teachers and student-teachers as my study participants who may become the next generation of enlightened educators confronting education crisis.

The global learning crisis due to the pandemic has created a fragile learning environment. In confronting this crisis, this research nobly finds a way to help eradicate assessment trauma as a form of violence that obstructs sustainable quality learning for all, and thus a threat to sustainable development defined and aimed by the United Nations (Lee, Kjaerulf, Turner, Cohen, Donnelly, Muggah, and Gilligan, 2016). Humbly, the Holistic Written Assessment Guide as outcome of this study can be an innovative tool applicable and accessible either in a digital or non-digital learning setting. Using such framework helps in the building trauma-free learning climate as a factor in the attainment of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal for inclusive and equitable education, and lifelong learning opportunities for all (Innovative tools…Ret 2022). The UN 2030 agenda are geared towards a poverty and discrimination-free world, where respect for human rights and dignity and the rule of law, justice, and equality is vibrant (Desa, 2016). Such agenda asserts the built-in call for quality education where everyone is free from traumatic educational processes. This agenda calls for tomorrow's dependable and upright educators as leaders in every nation, blossomed from the small seed of today's assessment trauma-free classroom.

Finally, noticing the interconnectedness of my own healing as the teacher moved by the predicaments of my learners, the healing of my students infected by unhealthy learning

assessment, and conceivably the transformation of education in the global context caused by traumatic learning environment, I was prompted with the first–second–third person traces of dynamism in Action Research (Gearty and Coghlan, 2018). This study looks at pedagogical healing from three distinct but linked up lenses namely, that of the teacher, the learner, and the educators of the world. With this, I learned to deeply value the essence of mutuality.

Realizations

Out of the modest desire and attempt of this study to figure out the healing of students from learning assessment trauma, other actors of the pedagogical pursuit: the teacher and the educators in every nation are equally drawn into and benefited from the liberating process. The integrality and substantiality of the first-second-third person dynamism is truly avowed. The learning emerging from the experiential experimentation undertaken by researchers and policy makers through Action Research transformations paradigm (Larrea, Bradbury, & Barandiaran, 2021) was recognized and valued in the healing journey with my students. Similarly, our entire Action Research endeavor bears out the mutuality articulated in various ways such as mutuality in awareness of being part of a collaborative task, of emotion that triggers intense dialogue, of inquiry directed towards a common goal of healing from unhealthy educational task, of recognition of individual nuances and aspirations, and mutuality in relational transformation as effect of the action.

The mutuality of the voices of the learners, teacher, and educators in every nation was instigated by this Action Research. Humbly, the whole process subtly turned out to be a moment of listening to our diverse inner selves, however, in converging together, we embraced our vulnerabilities and addressed our woundedness as pedagogical components. Likewise, we advocate for the healing of the world injured with a traumatic and enslaving kind of education.

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A slow and steady journey with Action Research

Interview with Malida Mooken

Malida Mooken, Danilo Streck, Miren Larrea

Danilo and Miren:

You are from Mauritius, you studied in Scotland, and you live in Canada. How do you think this has influenced your perspective on the global challenges we are facing nowadays?

Malida:

My perspectives of current global challenges are indeed shaped by where I come from, where I have been, and where I am: geographically and also culturally, philosophically, and emotionally. I often find myself positioned in more than one place or space, living in-between, back and forth, unsettled.

After my first degree and subsequently working for a few months in an offshore management company, I left Mauritius to undertake a Master degree at the University of Birmingham, in England. That was in 2007. The Master programme had a strong basis in industrial economics and I gained a critical appreciation of capitalism, globalisation, governance, and the impact of those on the competitiveness, and socio-economic development of industries, localities, regions, and countries. The scholarly work of Roger Sugden and Keith Cowling, especially *Transnational Monopoly Capitalism* had a significant influence on my thinking. My enhanced understanding of those issues led me to take a more critical look at the socio-economic development of Mauritius, which is often portrayed as an "economic success story in Africa" and I read about development in other small state economies. My concerns were centred on the effect of globalisation, activities of transnational corporations, and premature deindustrialisation. Those concerns were also tied in to my personal observations (from a young age) of changes taking place, for example in the textile industry, and the more general and increasing emphasis on the service sector in Mauritius.

I later moved to Scotland for my doctoral studies. There, I found myself mostly interested in reading philosophical texts by John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire: to name a few. A significant and lasting influence on understanding socio-economic issues has been the human development and capability approach (HDCA) developed by Amartya Sen and other scholars such as Martha Nussbaum, Sabina Alkire, and Ingrid Robeyns. A fundamental concern of the approach is with freedom and human flourishing, inspired by the works of Aristotle, Adam Smith, Rabindranath Tagore, among others. From reading Sen, I got interested in *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill and the much less discussed book of Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments.* The "human" substantive individual and collective freedoms, relational aspects, value judgments, choice, action and consequences became more central in my thinking.

An offer of a postdoctoral research position at the University of British Columbia brought me to British Columbia in Canada. My experience here has triggered reflections about the in-

tersection of race, gender, class and nation, and linguistic, economic, and political forms of discrimination/domination. Many of those issues are invariably associated with histories of colonialism and imperialism, and I have become acutely aware of how Euro-American centric my educational journey (including in Mauritius) has been. Conversations with a student about the academic system, indigenous governance, and on-going colonial practice, were especially thought-provoking, and gave me the last push to introspect on my beings and doings.

I have since been interacting with work on decoloniality, post coloniality and knowledge democracy to unlearn and learn. In January 2021, I was invited to join a group of early career researchers in the Qualitative Research Lab – Global South. In that group, I discovered, read and discussed the works of Gurmindher K. Bhambra, Bagele Chillisa, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Walter Mignolo, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Gayatri C. Spivak, and Aníbal Quijano, among others. We also share our own experiences and perspectives of current and past political, economic, social, and cultural issues in different countries, transcending geopolitical borders/boundaries.

My interactions over the years, conversing and respectfully debating with friends, classmates, colleagues, collaborators, students, and acquaintances from diverse backgrounds and parts of the globe have been invaluable, and have contributed significantly in shaping my view of the world. They brought forth the interconnectedness, responsibilities to each other and the planet, respect for differences, and the need to take an interest in problems facing citizens around the world. I have learnt to critically appreciate local-regional-global dynamics, and the importance of listening, observing, learning, and sharing with other citizens affected by pressing challenges, including climate change, food security, and equitable healthcare in different contexts.

Danilo and Miren:
How did you first encounter Action Research during your own academic career?

Malida:
I first encountered Action Research at the beginning of my doctoral studies. Alongside and linked to the PhD, I worked as a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Associate for a project between a university and an arts organisation. The main idea was to develop an evaluation framework to articulate the socio-economic impact of the organisation's activities. I did an inquiry in real-time: 'trailing' and collaborating with participants. I think, at the time, my thesis supervisor had heard of discussions about Action Research taking place at the Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness in San Sebastian. A few readings and references were shared with me, including Elden and Levin (1991), Gustavsen (1992), Levin and Nilssen and Finne (1995), Greenwood and Levin (1998, 2001), and Reason and Bradbury (2001). One thing led to another and I came across John Dewey's writings on inquiry, experience, and education, which resonated a lot with me.

I started to develop the inquiry for the KTP project with Action Research in mind. Soon after, I attended a workshop "Cooperative Action Research Activities" at Orkestra. I remember a presentation that you (Miren) and James Karlsen gave there, which concretised what doing Action Research in the field of regional/territorial development might imply.

Danilo and Miren:
How did this encounter change your view of research?

Malida:

I learnt about the possibility of bridging the gap between theory and practice through approaches that were action-oriented, context-bound, dialogical, and participatory. That, together with my experience in the Knowledge Transfer Partnership project, reinforced the relevance of Action Research. I became particularly interested in the idea of co-generating learning and knowing, which seemed more appropriate and truthful than the linearity of "knowledge transfer" from one actor to the other, typically from the university to the partner organisation.

It is one thing to read about Action Research, and another to put it into practice though. I was questioned by other academics about why I was trying "something different" and not applying what I "already knew". Fundamentally, I was against adopting a pre-determined framework, and I argued for letting the collaborative inquiry with the participants develop. Any conceptualisation had to emerge during and as a result of that process. I was not interested in testing an existing framework developed by others, which did not seem relevant to what I was observing/experiencing in the context of the arts organisation.

A key learning has been that Action Research as a process is fluid, not fixed. I also bear in mind that research can mean or signal different things to different people. It takes time and conscious effort to develop trust, a shared language, and understanding with collaborators/participants.

Danilo and Miren:

Could you please give us some context about what kind of Action Research projects you develop?

Malida:

For the last few years, I have been working with colleagues to develop projects in relation to the territorial development of the wine-producing regions in British Columbia. We actively engage with wine industry actors, policy-makers, and other publics to identify and understand strategic concerns, and to determine what and how the university can support them to address challenges and stimulate collaborative action. We have worked on issues such as quality and labelling, territorial identity, international positioning, collaboration, and focal areas for research and development. I should say that although the projects have characteristics of Action Research, they have not been explicitly or formally set up or labelled as "Action Research" projects.

To stimulate reflections, foster dialogue and trust, and co-generate knowledge and collaborative action amongst participants, we organise and facilitate safe spaces such as workshops and retreat-style forums. Other on-going engagement with industry actors takes place through informal conversations, participation in industry meetings, workshops, and conferences, and educational visits with students.

Danilo and Miren:

Is Action Research mainstream in your university? What were the challenges when proposing it?

Malida:

I have yet to see or hear anything that would suggest Action Research is mainstream. There seems to be more and more projects geared towards community engagement in some form of the other though.

Some colleagues and I share interest in the role of universities with regards to socio-economic development activities in the territory. For the projects that we work on, a core concern is with engaging the industry and other publics on challenges that they face in the territory, and to provide support where appropriate. I would say such interests and concerns contributed to an openness to Action Research, or at least, elements of it.

Institutional structures and processes can pose challenges. For example, requirements and language used ("recruitment of normal/control participants", "inclusion and exclusion criteria", "summary of procedures") in behavioural ethical reviews are counterintuitive to the real and distinct nature of Action Research projects, and how they develop in practice. I feel, in general, one of the biggest challenges is the lack of knowledge and understanding about action research and its diverse approaches: conceptually and in practice. In my experience, it is not taught and discussed enough in academia, in fields such as management and territorial development. Traditional, often positivist, perspectives remain dominant.

Danilo and Miren:

Whose work have you found most influential when deciding to do Action Research in British Columbia, Canada? How did these encourage you to take steps in your own path?

Malida:

Doing Action Research in British Columbia (BC) was a natural progression from the inquiry approach that I developed for my PhD and the KTP. As implied before, John Dewey's work has been particularly influential in that regard. There was significant interest in exploring and doing something along those lines in the context of the wine industry in British Columbia, and that was a strong reason why I joined UBC as a postdoctoral research fellow.

For me, the work on Action Research for territorial development (ARTD), developed by yourself, Miren, with James Karlsen and other colleagues has been particularly insightful. ARTD provided key reference points, which I found useful as an early career scholar working in the field of regional and territorial development, where Action Research is relatively less discussed, and written about. It helped to clearly position what we do in British Columbia at the intersection of territorial development and Action Research. I have drawn on your conceptualisation to reflect on and to articulate our own practical experience, learning and conceptual thinking in the context of British Columbia. It has inspired me to open up and write more about the process of doing Action Research, including the challenges involved.

Danilo and Miren:

What would you say about Action Research to a young researcher who has never heard about it?

Malida:

I would start a dialogue with the researcher about what she/he is interested in doing and achieving through research. I would share how for me Action Research (in the context of territorial development) is about going beyond one's own narrow research interests, analysis

and understanding, to connect with other actors in society to address problematic situations. It involves contributing to collective knowing and change in those situations, rooted in the interplay between theory and practice, and real-life experiences.

When teaching Action Research, I find it useful to discuss actual projects with students. This allows us to talk about the underlying philosophies, purposes, processes, and outcomes in more-depth. There are no two Action Research projects that are alike, not least because it depends on the values of those involved and the context. In addition to reading, I would encourage young researchers to participate in workshops, or small group discussions on Action Research, to learn about the various approaches and challenges from experienced Action Researchers. I also believe that one truly gets a deep sense of Action Research through learning by doing. Another suggestion would thus be to join in an Action Research project, if possible.

Danilo and Miren:

You have published some first-person insights on doing Action Research in the background, and feeling your contribution was to a large extent invisible. Could you tell us something about this?

Malida:

When I think back about my journey, I realise that I have developed (and am still developing) my approach to Action Research slowly and steadily. A significant part of my work has taken place in the background: planning, organising, conceptualising, facilitating and reflecting on content and processes with collaborators. I do not think that working in the background is unusual, but what I did find problematic after some time was a lack of recognition and visibility with regards to the contribution made, both conceptually and practically.

I remember a comment from a workshop participant, who queried why the lead academic *needed* me. When asked what he meant, the response was what/how did I and another colleague contribute to the project? In itself, the question is not irrelevant, and I reckon it arose because we were mostly sitting in the background taking notes during workshops and forums. However, what did bother me is *how* the question was posed, and also that the questioning was directed to us and not to others in the group. There have been various other instances where I felt that being in the background was problematic.

The words of a university colleague regarding potential discrimination, in general, because of how others might perceive me also echoed in my mind. I do not recall the exact words used to describe me, but they were along the following lines: "a petite young vulnerable Mauritian woman". This was not the first time I heard such a comment from a senior academic, and I really do not think that on either occasion any of those colleagues meant disrespect or harm. Nor did I find such comments to be personally distressing. I find that they reveal more about others' mindset than myself. Nevertheless, I became more conscious that my identity and intersectional markers (linked, for example, to race, gender, age, and culture) might have something to do with how I and my work were being perceived and taken for granted, and what seemed like limited valuable opportunities to me. Power dynamics, which are intrinsically linked to those, also came to mind.

I have to say here that I have good working relationships with colleagues that I work closely with, and I am known to be quite direct in saying things as they are. However, back then, I felt people would be defensive if I expressed myself on such issues. Part of the problem might

have been that I did not have the right words to articulate what was going on. Gradually, a growing sense of frustration and negativity crept in, and I knew those would be detrimental to me, both personally and professionally. I engaged in a form of first-person inquiry, to try and understand for myself what was happening, and to explore what I could do to change things. Through the inquiry, I began to identify and accept that the problem was more systemic than personal (as in it was not about me or directed solely towards me. It was fundamentally about the system that I was in). Once I had some clarity, I voiced out certain issues: pointing to what I observed and felt was going on around me, in academia and elsewhere. Reading, talking, and learning from other researchers about similar experiences or concerns really helped, which is why I am sharing some of my experience in this interview.

Miren, your reflections in *Roots and Wings of Action Research for Territorial Development* about the invisibility of facilitation, especially through a gender lens, in Action Research for Territorial Development were also thought-provoking, and led me to take a critical look at what was going on in my own environment. It catalysed my writing of the first-person insights that you mentioned, and it was liberating. I was able to process and articulate thoughts and emotions that I had held in for a long time.

Things have started to change. Writing and publishing about our work in British Columbia have in part helped in gaining more visibility in some arenas. In recent times, I have had more visibility and opportunities for my work to be openly recognised. And yet, those opportunities seem few and far in-between, and I feel there is much more left to do and change!

Danilo and Miren

How did power dynamics, nationality, racial differences, gender, age, hierarchy, social class, and culture influence your own Action Research path?

Malida:

Coming out of my own lived experiences and knowing about others' experiences, I am more critically aware of how those factors may impact interactions, inter-subjectivities, and opportunities for myself and for others. That has been an important part of my Action Research journey.

The first-person inquiry, which I discussed earlier on, led me to engage more with writings on intersectionality, and deepened my understanding and thinking on identity. I integrated some of that thinking in discussion with colleagues, and the work that I was contributing to on territorial identity with wine industry actors. To illustrate, a word that typically came up in discussions on the identity of the territory was "diversity", but it was mostly interpreted in terms of grape varietals, geographical and climatic conditions, and winemaking practices. The "human" aspect was missing. Reflections from my first-person inquiry in turn inspired me to do some secondary research about how diversity was approached in other wine-producing territories. I found some interesting narratives and wrote a short one-pager on diversity and identity, which we shared with industry actors in workshops across British Columbia. That opened up discussions, for example on race, age, gender, and culture.

Currently, my colleagues and I are considering the possibility of doing some work with regards to agricultural farmworker health and housing conditions. Many of those workers are migrants, who face various challenges, not least because of their nationalities, race, social class, culture, and power dynamics. For our next forum, part of our discussions will focus on health and housing issues. We will organise and facilitate discussion on those, so that par-

ticipants from the wine industry in British Columbia can reflect on and discuss what is going on elsewhere, for example in Napa Valley, and in their own wine regions. This is linked to the idea of raising critical consciousness and opening up possibilities for collective dialogue and knowing, so that participants can develop effective ways to address shared concerns and challenges.

An increased awareness of those factors also informs how I approach curriculum development and teaching as an Associate Director for our post-experience Master of Management. For example, in July 2022, our guest speakers for a two-week Intensive included a volunteer for a migrant justice collective, and a research co-ordinator working on homelessness. As signalled by the speakers, those are unusual discussion topics and experiences to discuss in a management programme.

Danilo and Miren:
You are the youngest of the editors of International Journal of Action Research. How did your relationship with this journal start, and how do you feel about being one of its editors?

Malida:
Miren, I think you mentioned about the 2020 International Journal of Action Research (IJAR) symposium during or soon after my visit to Orkestra in 2019. I signed up for the symposium and preparatory sessions, which were held online because of the pandemic. I had the opportunity to interact with various participants, including editors of IJAR, both in smaller group and in the larger group discussions. I would say that is how the relationship started.

It is an honour to be an editor of IJAR, working with both of you, and the other editors, Olav Eikeland, Richard Ennals, Emil Sobottka and Isabel Heck. If I may say, our respective backgrounds and experiences make for a very interesting group dynamic. I have found our conversations, for example on how Action Research is developing, the vision for the journal, and exploring new possibilities to support authors and contribute to the field of Action Research, to be very meaningful.

Danilo and Miren:
How do you think we could make the journal more appealing to young researchers?

Malida:
I think that continuing to personally invite more young researchers to join in discussions, workshops, and symposiums, as you have been doing, really helps. Perhaps strengthening the journal's presence online, for example through podcasts and social media platforms, might also be useful in enhancing IJAR's presence, and reaching out to a younger and wider audience.

Danilo and Miren:
What would you like to see in International Journal of Action Research in the future?

Malida:
As we discussed in the editors' meetings (and you would know more about this than I), the International Journal of Action Research has been mindfully working towards being more inclusive. I would like to see continued development in that direction with authors from

various parts of the world writing and publishing about Action Research projects, thereby opening up perspectives and dialogues about different workplace and territorial contexts.

I would also like to see if we can include and encourage publications such as visual essays in the journal. This ties in to arguments for democratising forms of expression, and hopefully overcoming some of the limitations of having English as the dominant language in mainstream academic publishing.

Danilo and Miren:

Thanks very much Malida for a thought provoking, inspiring and gratifying interview which will be very important for everyone, but especially for younger researchers approaching Action Research through IJAR.

Students' Quality Circles: QC Circles Re-engineered for Developing Student Personality. Dinesh P. Chapagain (2022)

James Karlsen

In this book, the author presents his experience from working with Students' Quality Circles (SQC). The author is a Professor of Engineering and of Business at Kathmandu University, Nepal. He has for the last twenty years worked with an alternative approach to Education in Schools inspired by the Japanese tradition of solving quality and productivity problems in the industry. Chapagain founded QUEST-Nepal (acronym of Quality Circles in Education for Students' Personality Development in Nepal), which is a network of SQC master trainers.

The book is organized in 8 chapters and an appendix with reading material. It is an open access book. Each chapter can be downloaded and read separately, and each chapter starts with an abstract and ends with key issues. In chapter one, it is asked why Students' Quality Circles are necessary in academics? The author starts by arguing that an "educational institute is not only a centre for providing appropriate knowledge and skills, but a character-building institution". A total quality person (TQP) is the outcome of such an institution, and SQC is the process for the personal development of students. SQC is a small team of like-minded students who meet regularly with the purpose to identify, analyze and solve their own problems. In a nutshell the aim is to enhance the pro-social personality of students and thus empower them with tool, technology and boost their moral values. Then follow three descriptive chapters. Chapter two describes the fundamentals of SQC, chapter three the major elements and chapter four the basic tools. In chapter five the focus is on how to implement SQC in academia. In chapter six the author describes how Quality Circles are evolving in the world and in the final chapter what the SQC masters say about SQC.

In the first chapter the author underlines that there is a broader knowledge than bookish knowledge. I agree in a distinction between knowledge, or more precisely, theoretical knowledge and knowing how. Knowing that is the ability to know why a certain issue exists and what its definition is (Ryle, 1949). According to Ryle (1949), knowing that is theoretical knowledge, while knowing how is the ability to do something. Knowing how emerges through the application of knowledge in a given context. Ryle (1949) argued in favour of knowing how in action, since knowing how is possible to observe and identify in action. Procedures and rules for an action cannot substitute for the knowing how to do that action. Knowing how cannot be prescribed and then executed. Knowing how is dynamic, and descriptions are static. Theoretical knowledge is thought knowing, expressed orally or in a written form; it is not knowledge in action. Knowing how can therefore not be transferred in a linear and codified form as "procedures" and "rules" but can only be shared through actions in a context between people. The two dimensions of knowledge are not reducible to each other. They are of different kinds. This distinction is important to be aware of when one takes the challenge to write from knowing how: i. e., practice.

I have chosen to review this book as an attempt to write from experience and practice from SQC. I interpret the book as a descriptive "how to do" book, and not as an "academic" book, following academic standards with a methodological discussion and position of the author's own research with a literature review and discussion of main concepts.

The book has different faces or approaches. I have identified at least three. The first is SQC as a philosophy or an idea for the evolution of education, which is presented in chapter one. The second approach is SQC as a leadership challenge, which is presented in chapter five, as how to implement SQC in academia. The third is SQC as a set of concrete principles to follow, presented in chapter three and four. However, as a "how to do" book, I miss a fourth approach, a presentation of concrete practices of SQC, which could have been presented as concrete cases.

Knowing how comes with dilemmas, tensions and conflicts. I miss a presentation and discussions of dilemmas, tensions and conflicts when applying SQC both on the individual and collective level among young people. One example of a tension is such as between the ""I am smart, will win' attitude on the one hand, and on the other hand, the SQC value "I am good, I will serve people". I think a presentation of some dilemmas and tensions and discussion of how they were solved would have been a valuable contribution of the book.

Reference

Ryle, G. (1949). *The Concept of Mind: 60th Anniversary Edition.* Hutchinson & Co.

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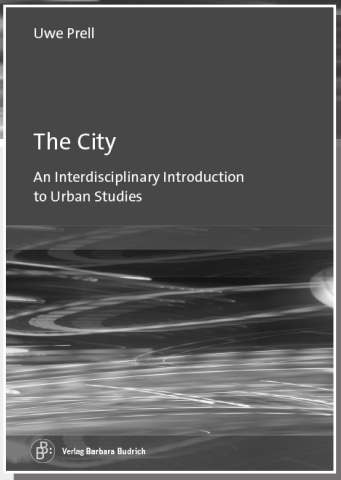
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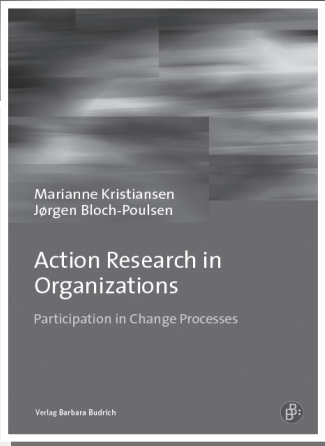
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