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Editorial

Health, quality, tangible transformations, and experimentation with aesthetics: diversity and connections within action research

Miren Larrea

This first issue of International Journal of Action Research in 2024 combines diverse perspectives and still, there are threads that connect the different contributions. To begin with, it is a pleasure for me to introduce the interview and the book review of this issue, as they help us understand the trajectory in action research of two women that have recently joined the group of editors of this journal.

In her interview, Lone Hersted shares her experience, and tells us about her education as an actress at an experimental theatre school, her studies in dramaturgy and theatre studies, and how all that is useful in her action research in the Alborg environment, in Denmark, where they combine systemic or narrative inquiries, arts-based and aesthetically informed approaches, and philosophical approaches based on existential, Socratic dialogues. The focus on aesthetics emerges later, again, in the paper by Aina Landsverk Hagen & Sara Berge Lorenzen.

The second woman that has joined the group of editors of IJAR is June Bam, and her work is addressed in this issue through the review written by Carolina Schenatto da Rosa, Danilo R. Streck and Richard Ennals of her book entitled "Ausi Told Me: (Re)inventing Action Research from South African Tradition". The authors of the review argue that in this book June Bam helps us understand how people's actions, thoughts and feelings are based on life stories that are renewed and recreated from generation to generation, revealing the leading role of women in producing knowledge of resistance and transformation. They also highlight how the historical, cultural, and political richness of South Africa offer new dimensions of participatory engagement and critical reflection to research, revealing the full potential of (re) invention and re-signification that Bam's work offers to action research.

The first of the articles, by Mark Howard is entitled "Insider action research in palliative care – the challenges of implementing digital health in a hospice organisation in the UK". It is based on the author's first-person experience of being a medical consultant and novice action researcher in a UK hospice setting. It addresses how the use of technology in healthcare can affect social processes and, more specifically, how in this case it affected the way the hospice staff felt about the loss of their role and identity. Healthcare is one of the main fields where action research is used by practitioners and this paper helps understand the connections between digital change and productivity and performance, and how action research can help by reconfiguring connectivity, control, and knowledge.

This last paper, however, is not the only paper in this issue that focuses on healthcare. Mary Casey, Áine Carroll, David Coghlan and Diarmuid Stokes, in their paper "Appraising

Quality in Action Research in Healthcare Settings" address criteria for establishing the quality of action research in this sector. They present the results of a scoping review on the quality of action research studies in the healthcare sector and, after summarising standards of quality in the publications they analyse, the authors suggest best practices for designing, undertaking and reporting high quality action research. The four core features they assess in these publications are context, quality of relationships, quality of the action research process and outcomes; and they conclude that there is a significant gap in the monitoring and reporting on the quality of action research studies regarding how these factors are discussed in relation to each of the others.

The third article, entitled "From Participatory Research to the Co-construction of Actions: Reflections on how to Reinforce Action Research for Social Inclusion based on the experience of the Parole d'excluEs' University Incubator" is written by Isabel Heck and it shares with the first paper by Mark Howard its approach to practitioner research. The core argument by Isabel is that an important part of the action research literature focuses on the participatory dimension of the research process and is much less explicit on the connection of research and action, or on how researchers contribute to tangible transformations. Consequently, she addresses this connection by sharing her action research experience in an anti-poverty organization in a low-income neighborhood in Montreal (Canada). She presents four functions of research that are at the core of this connection: produce and mobilize knowledge; document, analyze and systematize practice; codevelop projects, models and practice and enhance reflexivity. Finally, she proposes five characteristics to bridge the gap between research and action.

The fourth and final article in this issue, entitled "Chasing balloons as scientific practice: On transformative co-creation and relational ethics of care in the emerging field of youth citizen social science" is authored by Aina Landsverk Hagen and Sara Berge Lorenzen. It connects with Lone Hersted's invitation, in the initial interview, to experiment with art and aesthetics, as the authors experiment with form in order to make us not only learn about the process they describe, but immerse ourselves in that process to feel it. The article is based on empirical research with a group of young people in Oslo, Norway, and after experiencing this process Aina and Sara argue that they have witnessed closely how an epistemic ethics of care is integral to securing the epistemic justice of youth. They also conclude that citizen social science can promote both epistemic justice and epistemic abundance by including youth in all parts of a rigorous research process that produces new scientific knowledge. The article is the third and last of a thematic series on action research and citizen social science, based on the YouCount project and introduced by Patricia Canto and Reidun Norvoll in their Guest Editorial in the second issue of 2023.

By bringing these papers together International Journal of Action research aims at addressing diversity in action research. We also want to make space for the exploration of art and aesthetics as vehicles to transform action research through a generative interaction between reason and emotion. We hope the readers appreciate this effort.

From working with theatre to action research for more regenerative ways of living and organizing: Interview with Lone Hersted

Lone Hersted, Danilo Streck, Miren Larrea

Danilo and Miren:
Thanks, Lone, for this interview in International Journal of Action Research (IJAR). Considering you have recently joined us as an editor of IJAR, it is exciting for us to have the opportunity to get to know you better and share that with the readers of IJAR.

As an introduction to the interview, could you give the reader a perspective of your trajectory?

Lone:
Thanks Danilo and Miren for inviting me to this interview! You asked about my trajectory… Well, to make a long story short…I was born in Denmark in 1969 where I grew up. At the age of 16 I went to Peru as an exchange student and did theatre with a local theatre group. As a young woman in my early twenties, I was educated as an actress at an experimental theatre school and afterwards I studied dramaturgy for five years at Aarhus University (in Denmark) where I took a Master's degree in theatre studies. I worked with experimental theatre for around ten years in Denmark, Norway, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, and for a short period I was also involved with actors from Poland from whom I've learned a lot. My work has always been driven by curiosity, a strong social commitment, and the urge to experiment with new approaches and new ways of expression. I've never been interested in just reproducing the old tradition. For a period, I also worked with interactive digital media in relation to performance theatre and installation art. That was several years before the use of digital media in the art world became more widespread.

After becoming a mother to a lovely son, I started working as a consultant in the field of organizational development informed by systemic, narrative and social constructionist ideas and practices. In particular, I worked with team development based on dialogue and creative approaches to learning and collaboration, including the use of roleplaying. I also worked for a period at Aarhus Municipality as a family therapist with refugee families from many different countries.

In 2016 I submitted my PhD dissertation on relational leading and dialogical processes at Aalborg University. The American professor in social psychology, Kenneth Gergen, was my PhD supervisor. My PhD project was carried out within the frame of action research combining roleplaying with reflexive dialogues and reflecting team in small groups of leaders and employees. The aim was to enhance relational and dialogical competences among leaders and

employees through the use of roleplaying. The project was carried out in 10 public schools and at a residential institution for adolescents.

My PhD dissertation was inspired by the theoretical work of, among others, Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter, Mikhail Bakhtin, Lev Vygotsky and Ann Cunliffe. The writings of Gergen and Shotter let me to action research. In particular, an essay written by Kenneth Gergen on research as future forming and the writings on action research, "witness-thinking" and "knowing from within" by John Shotter captured my interest and inspired me in my work with action research.

In addition, I became very inspired by the work of Professor Louise Phillips from Roskilde University (Denmark), who had developed an analytical framework for the analysis of action research processes inspired by Bakhtin and Foucault. Here, emphasis was put on dialogue, discourse, power and ethics in collaborative research.

After the PhD, I achieved a position as assistant professor at Aalborg University (Denmark) and continued working with action research, mainly in institutions and schools in the public sector, and a few years later I achieved a position as associate professor at Aalborg University. I still develop and facilitate action research projects, and if appropriate, I combine it with creative elements such as theatre, poetry, drawings, singing etc. Recently I did an action research project in the financial sector with 12 bank managers with the aim of helping these managers move their organization into a more sustainable and regenerative direction. I was happy to experience their openness towards more creative and alternative approaches. For instance, we did meditation and a series of exercises in nature, which helped them to relax and open up their minds towards new perspectives.

Danilo and Miren:
We got to know you as an action researcher and were surprised to learn that you were educated as an actress, however, we probably shouldn't have been. How does your education and experience as an actress emerge in your action research? What is the connection between art and action research?

Lone:
I'm very interested in building bridges and finding ways to continue developing the field of action research by creative and aesthetical elements. As mentioned earlier, I try to include theatre, poetry, drawing, singing and sometimes as well sculpturing in my work with action research and as well activities in nature. I do this to create space for different kinds of learning, different ways of experiencing, which open up new ways of relating and new ways of knowing. It usually makes the process more joyful and more inspiring for the participants/co-researchers, as it opens up new perspectives and new ways of understanding.

Danilo and Miren:
IJAR has explored the connections between action researchers in Europe and Latin America. You are Danish, but you lived in Latin America for some time. Could you tell us about that experience and what you learnt that is significant to understand your perspective on action research?

Lone:
I think that action research is a very useful inquiry to work with complex problems – in our societies and communities, but also in our organizations and institutions. Action research is a powerful way of engaging people in transforming their lives, their workplaces and communities. In Latin America there is a strong tradition of participatory action research inspired by Paolo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda, Agosto Boal and many others, where emphasis is put on social justice, democracy, freedom of expression, emancipation, social equality, human rights and the improvement of the fundamental conditions for life, education and work etc.

When I worked with theatre in Latin America, I was very young, and I wasn't familiar with action research as such, but there were some similarities in the ways how we were engaged in collecting material and creating artistic expressions based on our own and other peoples lived experience. For instance, when I worked with a Peruvian theatre group or directed a theatre project with indigenous people living in the Ecuadorian rainforest, it was not just a matter of creating a beautiful piece of art, but as well a matter of raising important questions, sustaining identity work and revealing social injustice. The inspiration and material for the performances originated from the reality of the people living in these circumstances.

Danilo and Miren:
You are now part of an action researcher environment in Aalborg University where, especially through Marianne Kristiansen and Joergen Bloch Poulsen, IJAR received important contributions. Could you tell us about this environment and the kind of action research you do?

Lone:
We have a relatively small, but quite strong action research community at Aalborg University, and we're engaged in a larger action research network at a national level called Danish Action research Network (DAN). At Aalborg University, we work with many different approaches to action research in various kinds of organizations and environments. Particularly, in public organizations in the areas of health care, childcare, education, elder care, but we do as well facilitate action research projects in the private sector. For instance, as I mentioned, I recently facilitated an action research project on regenerative leadership with managers from the financial sector. Some of the researchers at Aalborg University work with systemic or narrative inquiries, others work with arts-based and aesthetically informed approaches, some work from a philosophical approach combining action research with existential, Socratic dialogues, and several of us try to combine some of these approaches and find new ways of doing action research. There are different approaches with roots in different paradigms: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, pragmatism and social constructionism. Right now, I experience that action researchers at Aalborg University are less dogmatic and more openminded towards approaches, which are different from their own, which has led to an enormous diversity in the field, where people are experimenting with many different ways of practicing action research and carrying out action research projects in many different contexts, which I find very life affirming and liberating.

In addition, several of our educational programs, in particular at master level, are built around problem-based learning and action research, which means that, our master students are encouraged to work with real problems in society inspired by action research for instance in the field of healthcare, social care, education, public administration, business development, green transition, sustainability etc. The fact that several of our educational programs are

integrating action research also contributes to maintain a strong action research environment among the staff. In addition, we meet and exchange our experience with action researchers from other parts of the country, for instance from Roskilde University and several university colleges in different areas of the country.

Danilo and Miren:
We want to go a bit deeper into what you have just described. Who do you think are the authors that have most influenced the action research environment in Aalborg? And who have been the authors that have most influenced you?

Lone:
Concerning the research environment at Aalborg University in general, I think it's difficult to answer this question, because people are inspired by many different traditions. As mentioned, some of my colleagues work from a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, others from a pragmatic orientation, others from a critical perspective and others from a systemic or social constructionist orientation.

But maybe, some of the most influential sources of inspiration at Aalborg University have been Bjørn Gustavsen, Øyvind Pålshaugen, Jørgen Bloch Poulsen, Marianne Kristiansen, Olav Eikeland, David Coghlan, Davydd Greenwood, Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, and in my case, particularly the social constructionists, Kenneth Gergen and John Shotter.

Actually, these years there is a strong movement in sustainability and more regenerative ways of organizing, working and producing services and goods, and I think that this movement could benefit from action research in order to involve citizens, decision makers, city planners, students, local entrepreneurs, local businesses in transforming our society into a more sustainable and regenerative direction. Therefore, I believe that action research will experience a kind of renaissance over the coming years, which probably also will contribute to new ways of doing and theorizing about action research.

Danilo and Miren:
There are several concepts we found interesting in your work, but let's pick one up. What is relational leading and how do you develop that through action research?

Lone:
Well, relational leading is an understanding of leadership where the capability of building up relationships and involving employees in dialogical processes are seen as essential. This is a move away from the authoritarian, heroic leader figure towards understanding leading as a relational, collective capacity involving all the members of an organization.

Some years ago, Kenneth Gergen and I started discussing this theme, and we decided to write a little book with the title *Relational Leading: Practices for Dialogically Based Collaboration*, which was published in 2013. The book was based on a series of workshops where we involved leaders, employees and consultants in roleplaying for the enhancement of dialogic and relational capabilities. My notion of relational leading builds on the understanding that through dialogical interaction and collaboration we can create new ways of moving forward together, while accepting that, in an organization, there will always be different voices and interpretations at stake. In our book we view organizations as webs of conversations,

conversational flows, or a confluence of conversations, which contrasts with the view of the organization as an ultimately rational and efficient machine.

My approach to relational leading is built on an understanding of leading and organizing, where communication is seen as a continuing process, emergent and open, and where people attempt to construct meaning together. In this view, meaning is not something preconceived and preplanned, but something which emerges through dialogue, interplay, and co-creation. Here we see many elements, which are also found in action research such as for instance the idea of polyvocality and democratic involvement.

Danilo and Miren:
We have often heard speak about a "Nordic" or "Scandinavian" approach to action research. How do you experience this? What does it mean for you? Is action research strong in these countries nowadays?

Lone:
I may disappoint you here, because personally, I'm not so much inspired by a so-called Nordic or Scandinavian tradition of action research, probably because my theoretical orientation mainly has been Anglo-Saxon, and I was just a little child in the seventies, when the action research movement was really strong in the Scandinavian countries. But of course, I acknowledge the work of Bjørn Gustavsen, Øyvind Pålshaugen, Olav Eikeland and others, who have influenced the action research communities in the Nordic countries. But as mentioned earlier, I myself work from a more systemic, narrative and social constructionist orientation to action research, which is another tradition.

Danilo and Miren:
We have met you not only in the IJAR environment, but also in AR+. What is your experience on how different action research communities relate to each other? There are multiple calls now for action researchers to come together to make action research significant in the face of eco-social challenges, how do you imagine we can do this?

Lone:
I think that it's quite interesting that there is a certain overlap between these environments, which creates opportunities to work together, sharing experience and uniting our resources and creative forces. There is a strong potential for collaboration and synergy.

Danilo and Miren:
You are preparing a special issue for IJAR now that will focus on action research and environmental sustainability. Tell us a bit more about this project.

Lone:
All right. We've made a call for papers on action research in favor of more sustainable and regenerative ways of living, organizing, producing etc. With this call for papers, we are interested in figuring out whether and how action research can further eco-social change for the better of our environment and society. As we point out in the call, when we talk about sustainability, we must also take in consideration social justice and equality. When we talk about green transition, we must also take in consideration political, economic, and social

change etc. In the guest editorial group, we consider that there is a huge need for research, which conceptualizes ideas, projects, and initiatives for sustainability, through the integration of both ecological and social perspectives. Therefore, we were calling for papers concerning action research projects dealing with complex eco-social problems with the aim of transforming our society towards a more sustainable and regenerative direction by the active involvement of citizens and practitioners.

Danilo and Miren:
Let's continue talking about IJAR. As we pointed out in the introduction, you have recently joined the group of editors. What are your expectations for the journal?

Lone:
I think that IJAR is a very important journal in the debate and dissemination of action research, and my hope is that the journal can continue to encourage and inspire the development of action research in relation to the eco-social problems that we are confronting both in this moment of history but also in a future perspective while taking in consideration future generations. We must think globally and act locally and, as I see it, action research is a very inspiring and effective approach to engage people in working with eco-social challenges and societal change.

Danilo and Miren:
To close the interview, we always ask interviewees what they see as the distinctive role of IJAR in the action research community. Do you want to add anything to what you already said about the journal?

Lone:
I think that IJAR fulfills a very important role of debating and disseminating action research, and also that it contributes to the continuous renewal in the field. I look very much forward to continuing our collaboration in the editorial group, and I also hope that we can engage and encourage young researchers from all around the world to get more involved in action research. I wish to thank you, Miren and Danilo, and the other members of the editorial board, for inviting me into this exciting community, and I look very much forward to getting to know you even better and to our future dialogues about action research.

Danilo and Miren:
Thanks very much, Lone, for the time you have dedicated to this interview and the readers of IJAR.

Insider action research in palliative care – the challenges of implementing digital health in a hospice organisation in the UK

Mark Howard

Abstract: This paper describes the first-person experience of being a medical consultant and novice action researcher in a UK hospice setting. A new digital IT system resulted in unexpected changes to productivity. An action research methodology using cycles of co-operative inquiry with hospice staff was chosen to investigate. The new technology caused fears among hospice nurses that the authenticity of the hospice ethos would be lost. The hospice staff were concerned about the loss of their role and identity. Action cycles were used to positively transform the hospice nursing structure and admission process.

Keywords: insider action research, palliative care, digital health, identity

Investigación acción interna en cuidados paliativos- los retos de implementar sistemas digitales de salud en un hospicio en el Reino Unido

Resumen: Este artículo describe la experiencia en primera persona de ser simultáneamente un consultor médico y un investigador en la acción novato en un entorno de cuidados paliativos en el Reino Unido. El punto de partida para el caso fue un nuevo sistema de tecnologías de la información digitales que generó cambios inesperados en la productividad. Para investigar estos cambios se eligió una metodología de investigación-acción que consistió en ciclos de investigación cooperativa con el personal de cuidados paliativos. La nueva tecnología había hecho, a las enfermeras de cuidados paliativos, temer que se perdiera el auténtico espíritu de los cuidados paliativos. El personal del hospicio estaba preocupado por la pérdida de su rol y su identidad. Los ciclos de acción permitieron transformar positivamente la estructura de enfermería de cuidados paliativos y el proceso de admisión.

Palabras clave: investigación acción por internos, cuidados paliativos, salud digital, identidad

1. Introduction

This paper aims to describe the endeavours of a novice action researcher in a healthcare environment. A period of staff upheaval and conflict arose after the introduction of a digital

patient record into the inpatient unit of a hospice. The nursing staff found their workload increase, and the digital system limited their ability to admit patients to the ward. Through action, reflection, and learning, the hospice team explored this paradoxical reduction in organisational efficiency that the technology brought to their working lives and how it affected their perception of their role. It allowed the frontline staff a voice and communicative space so senior management could understand the unintended consequences of information technology (IT) investment.

Throughout the project, the inquiry group's perception of technology changed. Instead of being seen as a novel solution to improve efficiency, they recognised it as a significant factor in the crisis. The creation of the communicative space allowed the co-participants to express their voice and challenge the structures of power that wished to modernise hospice practices using technology. It enabled them to have agency in how they shifted their working practices to account for the technology and bring back the sense of identity in their role as hospice nurses.

Action research has been implemented in palliative care to bring about change and gain knowledge from practice (Hemberg & Bergdahl, 2020; Hockley & Froggatt, 2006; Hynes et al., 2012b; Jack et al., 2009; Kaiser et al., 2019; Molloy & Phelan, 2022). It recognises that participants have a say in how learning is gained about them and the decisions that may affect them. It is intensely political and requires the practitioner-researcher to understand the organisation's power structure and politics.

The World Health Organisation defines palliative care as "an approach that improves the quality of life of patients (adults and children) and their families who are facing problems associated with life-threatening illness. It prevents and relieves suffering through the early identification, correct assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, whether physical, psychosocial or spiritual" (World Health Organisation, n.d.). Although this definition is accepted, in a health organisation, several views about a particular operational problem or process exist. On the other hand, according to Bradbury (2015), action research is

> "a democratic and participative orientation to knowledge creation. It brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern. Action research is a pragmatic co-creation of knowing with, not about, people."

Action research lies within the critical social theory paradigm and differs from the ontological standpoint of positivism (Hockley, 2012). The researcher does not study the issue through their lens; rather, the problem is studied with other participants in a process of joint meaning-making. Coghlan (2019) argues that

> "action research focuses on simultaneous action and research in a collaborative manner."

and describes how researchers can move between theory and practical knowing (the concept of "interiority"). Action research includes a self-knowledge process, allowing one to reflect and critique one's insights. A spiral of action research cycles (action, learning and reflection) guide the project. Reflexivity is a crucial feature of participatory action research and involves examining one's existing ways of thinking, assumptions and underlying patterns of values and worldviews (Kjellström & Mitchell, 2019). An action research approach was used because of the participative principles that lie at its core and to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

2. Positionality of the author

I had 11 years of clinical experience when I joined the hospice organisation as a senior medical practitioner. Three simultaneous change projects were happening. The first was the implementation of a digital record on the inpatient ward to bring it in line with the National Health Service (NHS) 5-year forward view (*NHS England, 2014*). The hospice was trying to conform with this national strategy that recommended that all healthcare records be digitised. The second project aimed to improve remote IT access for community hospice nurses. The third sought to record (and report) outcome measures. Each of these projects had its project manager and cross-service focus groups.

The research journey began in 2016 when I joined the organisation as a physician in palliative medicine. Examples of the use of action research by medical practitioners in the literature are few. Indeed, the non-positivist approach resulted in a steep learning curve, making the project rewarding and challenging at different times. The level of reflexivity required was not taught at medical school or on postgraduate research courses that I previously attended. It was also a challenge to step outside the positivist paradigm of biomedicine and hold the dual roles of insider-researcher and senior medical staff member. As a novice, I was apprehensive at various stages, having doubts and questions about the approach's effectiveness. I had to work through my elitist stance about positivist research compared to that grounded in other research philosophies.

My role as a newcomer to the hospice allowed easier identification and engagement with the hospice nurses (in contrast to being seen as an NHS manager bringing an external process-driven ethos). This dual role as a researcher and employee was challenging to navigate, not only because of the tensions inherent in such a position but also due to my internal struggles as a positivist biomedical researcher new to critical theory.

3. Presentation of the case and motivation for the study

Over the 12 months that followed the digitisation of the patient record, the waiting times and waiting list for patients to be admitted to the hospice grew. In tandem, the available beds in the hospice were not adequately used because there was a new limit on the number of patients that could be admitted daily. This bottleneck in the patient pathway caused a decrease in hospice bed occupancy and throughput. These measures are essential when negotiating contracts with the NHS clinical commissioning groups that pay for the services on behalf of the population. Even though the organisation was funded primarily through charitable donations, it still received a proportion of its annual budget from these contracts. Waiting list increases led to significant upset for the stakeholders such as patients and their families, community general practitioners, district nurses and hospital teams. The hospice managers and Board of Trustees were also concerned about the reputational risk to the organisation.

In the UK, patients are admitted to inpatient hospices from the community or acute hospital. They come for end-of-life care or management of complex physical or psychosocial problems. Patients could be in urgent need of a hospice bed and may choose to be admitted there instead of the acute hospital. The hospice has a different environment with a more

holistic ethos of care. Patients and families regard it as a place of safety to obtain relief from their suffering and distress. If there are delays in admission to a hospice bed, this can have a detrimental impact on the patient and their families.

I had learned about action research as part of a postgraduate business qualification and was encouraged to use it to explore an issue of concern in the workplace. I was motivated to improve the situation because of my clinical experience as a physician in palliative medicine and previous experience with quality improvement and IT. The hospice's CEO and executive directors supported action research because they believed it would help bring about transformation. The Board of Trustees and the executive team also wanted to develop the research profile and reputation of the hospice, moving from being a "research aware" to a "research active" institution (Payne & Turner, 2012).

Recent work by Nyman et al. (2016) describes how an action research project was nested into a broader quality improvement programme on a maternity unit to reduce inpatient stays and create continuous quality development. This allowed many action research cycles to take place alongside the initiatives happening as part of the wider departmental quality improvement work. Similarly, in this study, the action research project was "nested" into a broader hospice "inpatient review group", which had been initiated to contend with the crisis in hospice performance. This larger group's work consisted of interviews with the hospice Trustees, external reviews, audit reporting and developmental sessions with stakeholders. The action research project started at the same time. I made a presentation to senior management after a period of engagement with neighbouring hospices and the collection of baseline data. A creativity workshop took place, as well as interviews with staff members.

4. Basic concepts to understand the case

4.1. Productivity and performance paradoxes in healthcare

The "productivity paradox" was a term coined in 1987 by Robert Solow (1987), which described the lack of commercial growth despite investment in information technology. This phenomenon has been studied in healthcare (Hebert, 1998; Lapointe et al., 2011), and a sizeable body of research details how technology reconfigures health practices. Henwood and Marent (2019) describe the tension between different theoretical standpoints, namely how to avoid the extremes of social determinism and technological determinism while at the same time recognising the materiality of technology and the social relations that emerge from digital health. Some of these perspectives highlight how these tools disrupt traditional practices and hierarchies of care, whereas others focus on continuity and the adjustments required to balance technology and social relations.

There has been considerable investment in healthcare IT in the UK and the USA, with systematic reviews reporting it as a means of improving efficiency, cost and outcomes (Chaudhry et al., 2006; Kruse & Beane, 2018). Productivity in business is generally expressed as the ratio of output per unit of input. It is simple to define but challenging to measure because the value of a product or service for the end-user (patient) is dependent on less tangible factors. In healthcare, the language of productivity is prevalent; for example, the

Office of National Statistics in the UK has recorded productivity growth in the NHS from 1997 to 2014 (Wilkes, 2017)

The language of performance targets, productivity and efficiency has been used in healthcare since the 1970 s when "new public management" (NPM) changed public sector accountability in many countries. Lewis (2016) explores the "performance paradox" between measurement and management and how it can lead to unintended and undesirable effects. It alters the priorities and practices of those delivering interventions (such as in healthcare) and results in worse outcomes for those who are meant to benefit (Lowe, 2013; Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). Both of these paradoxes (i. e. that of productivity and performance) became apparent as the co-operative inquiry progressed, illustrating the impact that digital change can have on a system with many complex components.

4.2. Different voices and lifeworlds in the same organisation

Hellstrom et al. (2010) describe the delicate balancing act of managing the different voices within a complex healthcare organisation. They explore Gouberman & Mintzberg's (2001) description of how healthcare management initiatives fail due to the "horizontal cleavage" between those who work clinically (i. e. nurses and physicians) and those who do not (managers and trustees). The systems of healthcare are challenging to manage because of the distinction of their parts. They propose that the world of a healthcare system (such as a hospital) is composed of four, namely that of cure (physicians), care (nursing), control (managers) and community (trustees). Each of these distinctions has its mindset and reporting hierarchies. Nursing provides more or less continuous care and comes close to the overall organisers of the system. This division is also apparent in other work by Hynes et al., where different "voices" or "competing and unequal narratives" (Hynes et al., 2012a, 2015) challenge service development during co-operative inquiries.

4.3. Communicative spaces and knowledge creation in action research

Habermas' theory of communicative action (1985) critiques functional reason expressed in a language of goals, rules, roles and organisational functions. He proposed that the communicative space offers a way out of the trap of functional reason that governs much of contemporary life. The operation of these systems cannot deal with practical questions about how social life happens between human beings. Crises occur at the boundary of these lifeworlds and systems, where functional reason can threaten culture, social integration and socialisation-individuation (people's sense of personal identity) (Habermas, 1985). Within action research, paradoxes are inherent in opening communicative spaces. Wicks and Reason (2009) illustrate how the process can be mapped onto a theory of group development that proceeds through phases of inclusion, control and intimacy. In this liminal space between Habermas' system and lifeworld, there exists the potential for new ways of communicating. Those initiating the action research process must hold together the opposing qualities within the communicative space.

Hayward (1998) develops Foucault's theory (Sargiacomo, 2009) of de-facing power by defining it as a 'network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors'.

These boundaries are shaped by discourse, and Hayward argues that freedom is the ability to act on these boundaries and shape them. Gaventa and Cornwall (2015) explore this in proposing that power is the capability to act on these boundaries, and broadening them may not necessarily limit the boundaries of others. Marginalised people can have a voice and capability, and can influence social and power relations. These groups are empowered through critical reflection and learning.

Gaventa and Cornwall (2015) outline Luke's (1974) and Foucault's (Sargiacomo, 2009) development of three dimensions of knowledge creation and how they relate to power. The first dimension describes how knowledge can be seen as a resource to inform debate and decision-making. In the second dimension, the control over the production of knowledge is used by the powerful to set the public agenda by including or excluding certain parties from acting upon it. The third dimension describes how power is used insidiously to prevent conflict from arising in the first place through means such as secrecy, media and education (Lukes, 1974). The current study demonstrated these action research themes of the communicative space and how power relates to knowledge creation

5. Method

5.1. Insider Action Research

Coghlan and Shani (2015) illustrate how undertaking action research in one's organisation can enhance organisational capabilities and impact change. The insider has to deal with emergent processes central to the research process itself (Coghlan, 2008). They propose three challenges for the insider of pre-understanding, role duality and organisational politics. Each can then be further examined in terms of first, second and third-person voice. First-person voice relates to one's assumptions, second-person involves collaboration with those that have long-standing relationships and third-person relates to the broader community of theory and practice. Pre-understanding means questioning familiar situations where things are taken for granted and facilitating teams to test these assumptions. It can help others to change their systems from within.

Role-duality describes holding and valuing both roles (employee and researcher) and dealing with conflicting demands. It can involve role negotiation with others, which can be challenging, particularly with superiors. Sharing this learning with the broader community of practice can add to the knowledge of roles in systems. From a second-person standpoint, action researchers have to build relationships and trust with people with different mental models and at different levels of the organisation (Pettigrew, 2003). Action researchers not only need to manage these three challenges of pre-understanding, role-duality, and organisational politics but also have to examine and reflect on them and share learning with the wider community.

Ospina (2004) explains how the democratic aspirations of action research are more challenging to realise in practice than in theory. I came from a leadership and management position in the organisation but also attempted to work on behalf of those using the new digital record in their day-to-day work. Participants were employees of the hospice charity and were therefore assumed to share values in line with the charity's mission and vision. Six came from

a nursing background, and two were from the IT support team. There was dissatisfaction with the new digital system, which motivated the participants to explore these issues within a safe communicative space.

5.2. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained in July ’18 from the Departmental Research Ethics Panel (DREP) under the terms of Anglia Ruskin University’s Research Ethics Policy. Data was collected over three months (July to September 2018), whereas the timeframe in which all action cycles occurred was 12 months (July 2018 to June 2019). Written consent was obtained from all of the research participants before the creativity workshop and interviews.

5.3. Data collection

The data were collected iteratively and informally using a reflective log. It included personal notes from interviews with staff, management meetings and a “creativity workshop”. Notes were also taken from communication with other hospices using a similar electronic health record. The themes from this log were used to inform meetings with colleagues. Feedback from staff about the digital health record and the change process was collected in the reflective log. This was used iteratively in interviews and management meetings.

6. Results

An action research group works towards intersubjective agreement, consensus and mutual understanding. A space is created where these boundary crises can be explored, and disagreements, learning and decisions can be debated openly. In the current study, the changing structure of the healthcare system collided with the lifeworld of the hospice staff. The paradoxical reduction in productivity seen after the introduction of digital health is an example of how functional reason (of the healthcare managers and the health system) threatened the culture and identity of the hospice nurses’ lifeworld. The co-inquiry initially intended to improve efficiency in the hospice ward; however, this gave way to the collective understanding of the paradoxical forces at play. It led to an exploration of the impact of new technology on role delineation, staff relationships and the hospice nurses’ personal and professional identity. The new technology threatened the social fabric of the hospice team because it was disruptive to the informal communication that happened between staff. Lichtenstein (2015) describes how emergence occurs in complex systems and how crises are the catalyst and can lead organisations to question their guiding assumptions. This can shift the organisational change from incremental to significant transformation.

6.1. How the action research progressed

A "creativity workshop" was held after a period of engagement and communication with the hospice staff. I was apprehensive that the action research project would be perceived as undermining the existing "inpatient review group" and that the staff would be reticent about engaging in research in general. I approached several nurses, management, and IT staff to explain the over-arching theory and aim of the action research. I emphasised how action research differed from traditional positivist approaches to research.

At the workshop were two registered nurses, a nursing ward manager, a practice development nurse, the clinical audit lead and two members of the clinical information team (who supported the electronic patient record system). The author presented data on PowerPoint to the workshop participants. This consisted of information about neighbouring hospices' IT systems, admission processes and time taken to complete admissions. Participants discussed these data and were invited to write down what they thought needed to change to improve their processes. The workshop endorsed divergent and convergent thinking (Basadur, 1996). A creative atmosphere was encouraged, and it was emphasised that judgment would be suspended during that part of the workshop. The participants wrote down and collected their ideas, and each was discussed by the group. A reflective log entry was recorded after the workshop. The interviews took place shortly after the workshop and included questions about staffing, ward setup and management.

The process of change management during the introduction of the digital system was criticised by one practice development nurse in the interview;

P5: "people need to understand why change is happening. There is a way of changing and a way of accepting"

The increasing workload brought about by the new digital system had caused staff to plead for more resources; as one nurse expressed;

P2: "Call me crazy but I'm just putting it out there – what about an admission nurse?"

This was echoed by other participants, with calls for more dedicated "admission" roles for the nurses, doctors or healthcare assistants. If the responsibility for admitting a patient to the ward was more precise, this would take pressure off the rest of the nursing team on that day. Recruitment constraints were cited during the workshop as the limiting factor for this proposal. Other physical resources such as dedicated workstations were suggested;

P1: "I'd like to see a small workstation with a desk at each [4-bedded] bay – this would allow IT access and the bed folders could be kept at the nurse's station"

One nurse reported that even with a dedicated space to complete digital patient notes, they would still be alert to the patient call bells and would allow themselves to be interrupted in order to help their colleagues.

P2: "it was about an hour for the computer stuff, then I went on break. After break I did another hour with the care plans and then I had to help with the 8pm medication round. I've been interrupted frequently during the shift – I can't remember how many times. I'm still not finished even though my shift ends in 45 minutes"

They also reported the practical differences between the old paper-based record and the new digital record

P4: "its very simple to start writing in the paper notes and leave the desk if you are interrupted. Its quick and easy to come back, open up the chart and start writing again. With the computer, you have to find a free workstation, login to different systems and this really adds to the time taken"

A holistic assessment is a central component of palliative care. The impact of the digital system on the admission process was evident in the interviews with one senior staff nurse

P4: "the doctors shouldn't rigidly stick to a symptom checklist, but could perhaps start by letting the patient tell their story, or by asking about the family and filling in the family tree section"

As much information as possible is collected about the patient on admission to the hospice. If this is not done thoroughly on the day of the admission, it is unlikely to happen at a later point. Several nurses said there were missed opportunities to gather this information because of the digital record

P1: "what is the point if no one looks at the smartforms afterward?"

6.2. Paradoxes highlighted by the action research

Hebert (1998) studied the productivity paradox in healthcare systems in community-based and acute care hospitals in British Columbia, Canada. He proposed using a combination of Donabedian's healthcare framework (Donabedian, 1980, 1988) in combination with Grusec's (1986) three levels of IT impact (i. e. how structure, process and outcome are impacted through levels of substitution, proceduralisation and new capabilities). In the current study, the electronic record was intended to substitute the method of handwritten nursing/medical notes (structure). Instead, it affected what the nurses considered to constitute their work and took them away from the patient's bedside.

P1: "the admission took the whole shift"

The new IT system impacted the admission process by lengthening the time taken to complete this task. The role and responsibility changes Hebert (1998) noted were observed in this example. The introduction of the IT system eventually forced a change in who was responsible for completing the electronic documentation. During the workshop, one nurse asked about responsibilities around the new outcome measures that were being recorded on admission

P3: "why cant the doctors do more of the OACC work such as iPOS, AKPS, and why cant the doctors do more of the icare entry at the bedside?"

As the group discussed the issues in the workshop and the interviews, it became apparent that the new IT system had an unintended impact on how the nurses viewed their professional role and how they worked with their own patients and colleagues. The co-inquiry process in the communicative space made such an articulation possible.

P4: "we don't want to lose the holistic joint assessment – I've noticed more of a split between doctors and nurses with the electronic forms"

The managerialist ideologies underpinning the IT system's introduction also affected the nurses' relationship with their management team. The nurses were trying to contend with the expected increased productivity and performance promised by the new IT system. Instead, a

reduction in productivity happened because of new ways of knowledge and working imposed by technology.

6.3. Loss of power amid digital change

Even though the action research aimed to explore the effect of the new IT system, the proposed co-inquiry allowed these nurses to feel empowered and to voice their concerns. This highlighted a paradox of leadership faced by insider action researchers who hold senior positions in an organisation (Chowns, 2008; Marshall, 2017; Nolan, 2005). I attempted to create a democratic participatory space for the co-inquiry but was still being approached outside of this space to use my position to influence change. For example, two senior nurses approached me to express their concern about potential changes to the structure of the nursing teams on the hospice ward. The nursing management had proposed combining two nursing teams to make the rotas more manageable. This idea had been resisted by the nurses, who sought assurance from the author that the status quo would remain in place.

Management and governance meetings continued throughout the project. The findings from the action research process were shared at several points. The project helped empower the nurses to develop solutions to the problems brought by the new IT system so they could attempt to maintain their holistic clinical care. Some of these changes are described in Figure 1. These include changes to the inpatient ward, changes to the nursing care plan and changes in responsibility for who documents clinical admission. For example, the entire responsibility for documenting the holistic assessment had to be transferred to the admitting doctor, which allowed the nurse to complete the paper nursing care plans that had been organised into a "booklet". The nursing rotas were amended to allow overlap between nursing shifts so that more staff were available in the afternoon to help with the admission.

7. Discussion

7.1. Summary of the concepts related to the case

The action research project opened a communicative space which allowed the co-participants to enact transformation. This allowed the different lifeworlds and voices to emerge and highlighted the shortcomings in how the digital change process was instigated. The re-configuration of connectivity, control and knowledge resulted in a paradoxical decline in productivity and performance.

The crisis in patient throughput and occupancy levels in the hospice necessitated the "inpatient review group" to begin its work. Nested within that group was the action research project which sought to bring about transformation through a participative process. In this inquiry, the action research approach allowed key staff members to collaboratively reflect and develop ways of working with change. It enabled the hospice team to recognise that introducing new technology led to changes to processes, staffing and organisational thinking.

P4: "we really need to be looking at what we're recording, why we're recording it, why we use it and whether we really need it"

Table 1 – co-operative inquiry action cycles

Background work	Cycle 1 – Information gathering	Cycle 2 – participatory work	Cycle 3 – piloting changes and organisational reflection
Approaching and engaging with prospective co-researchers and the management team within the organisation	Engagement with other hospices for information on average admission times Measurement of admission times in hospice Sharing of information with staff and management team Engagement with other hospices for information on average admission times	Co-operative inquiry workshop (n=7) 1:1 interviews (n=5) Sharing results with the organisation's management team	Quiet room on the hospice ward Admission booklet Change in nursing shift structure Change in responsibility for documentation of admission notes

The nurses chose to work in palliative care for personal and altruistic reasons. They sought to improve the quality of life for those who were dying and would often forego a higher salary being offered in the NHS hospital. Productivity at the hospice ward level (represented by throughput and occupancy levels) did not increase with the introduction of the technology. The changeover to the digital system raised fears about the loss of authenticity and the holistic approach. This disruption led to the nurses questioning their sense of purpose in their professional role;

P4: This isn't why I went into nursing

With these insights, the team was able to enact changes through action cycles that led to better adaptation to the new system.

Action research entails a collective group embarking on a change to their practices and practice architecture. People offer critical ability to gain insights into their practice and environment as a group. They meet with a shared commitment to communicative action. Kemmis et al. (2008) outline Habermas' theory of communicative action – his contribution to our understanding of public discourse in public spheres. These spheres come about by suspending hierarchical roles and rules, and presuppose communicative freedom. These spaces occur in response to circumstances, policies or decisions that lack legitimacy to those in public. The creativity workshop and interviews gave the nursing staff an equal footing to air their grievances and discuss solutions.

7.2. Reconfiguration of power and democratisation

Several frontline nurses were critical of the NHS managerialist ideology underpinning the change process. The technology was seen as an external influence from outside the organisation. It was perceived as an initiative imposed by managers who did not originally come from palliative nursing backgrounds. They frequently accused the management team of poor understanding of their role as hospice nurses.

P5: "Change had been instigated in a very dictatorial way"

Following the previously presented arguments by Hayward (1998), there was political fallout within the organisation during the project. The nurses and care staff were critical of a nursing manager, and this was fed back to the hospice board of trustees. This ultimately led to the manager submitting their resignation. The co-inquiry (workshop and interviews) allowed the grievances to enter the political arena between the powerful and powerless. The nursing team also gained the ability to change the structure of the nursing rotas to accommodate the increased workload.

7.3. Orders of change and organisational learning

Moch and Bartunek (Moch & Bartunek, 1990) describe three "orders of change" when considering organisational systems. First-order change is implemented within an existing manner of thinking. In this study, the changes to the admission template and the "admission booklet" are examples of first-order change. Second-order change occurs when the core assumptions that underpin a situation are questioned or altered. Third-order change occurs

when members of the organisation question their own attitudinal and cultural assumptions to bring about transformation. The reduction in occupancy and throughput prompted a change to the existing admission process, forcing the managers to question their assumptions about the efficiencies that IT brought to a busy hospice ward. The analysis of the research participants' beliefs was strengthened by information gathered from the creativity workshop, interviews and other hospices.

Some of the themes that emerged in the communicative space included the reconfiguration of knowledge, control and connectivity. The action cycles that produced new knowledge allowed the co-participants to challenge the "change" agenda in the hospice, and the assumptions that new technology brought to clinical practice. The deeper implication of introducing new IT was how it affected the hospice nurses' sense of their professional identity, particularly their relationship with their patients. The disruption to their established ways of working had a detrimental effect on their workload, thus affecting how much time and attention they could give to their patients. Many openly questioned their professional identity with the introduction of the new digital record. The participative co-inquiry gave them their own sense of agency and control. The digital technology caused deep-seated changes within the organisation, and a return to original levels of productivity was not met. The findings of the co-inquiry were shared with members of the hospice executive team. This allowed second-order change to happen and for the executives to question these assumptions about the promised benefits of digital health. The nurses felt empowered by the co-inquiry, and it gave them the agency to influence their staffing and practice on the hospice ward.

There were several limitations to this study. The project was limited by its timescale, as real organisational change can take many years to occur (Henderson & McKillop, 2007). The study setting was an 18-bed hospice in the UK with its local workforce challenges and historical context. Efforts were made to include a range of employees from different disciplines within the organisation. However, the lead author was a senior clinician in the organisation, and this could have influenced the research participants' engagement with the project. The creativity workshop and interviews were not recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis. However, journal entries were recorded immediately after each encounter, and a detailed reflective journal was kept throughout the course of the project.

The length and breadth of social science research offers valuable insights into the complexities of how technology arises in healthcare. Technology is enacted through promissory discourses and practices and is found to reconfigure knowledge, connectivity and control. This evidence could encourage small healthcare organisations to be cautious with their assumption that investment in health information technology will guarantee efficiency and productivity. Further research on levels of IT support and changes to staffing structure with new digital initiatives could help guide third-sector organisations with these projects.

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Appraising Quality in Action Research in Healthcare Settings

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Abstract: Criteria for establishing the quality of action research is of increasing interest to researchers and practitioners however, it is not known how well these criteria are used. This review addresses this issue by appraising extant measures that assess quality in action research. Taking Coghlan and Shani's (2014, 2018) four quality factors: context, quality of relationships, quality of the action process and outcomes, this scoping review examines if and how these factors have featured as quality criteria. While all studies included in this review reported on the four quality factors, no study reported in any detail on how any of the factors were integrated with one another. Findings therefore highlight a significant gap in the monitoring and reporting on the quality of action research studies. Addressing these gaps will support the development of future action research aimed at mitigating the lack of quality associated with action research approaches.

Keywords: Quality factors in action research; healthcare**,** scoping review

Mejorando la Calidad de la Investigación Acción en contextos Sanitarios

Resumen: Los criterios para establecer la calidad de la investigación-acción son de creciente interés para los investigadores y profesionales, sin embargo, no se sabe qué tan bien se utilizan estos criterios. Esta revisión aborda esta cuestión mediante la evaluación de las medidas existentes que evalúan la calidad de la investigación-acción. Tomando los cuatro factores de calidad de Coghlan y Shani (2014, 2018): contexto, calidad de las relaciones, calidad del proceso de acción y resultados, esta revisión exploratoria examina si estos factores han aparecido como criterios de calidad y cómo. Si bien todos los estudios incluidos en esta revisión informaron sobre los cuatro factores de calidad, ningún estudio informó en detalle sobre cómo se integraron entre sí los factores. Por lo tanto, los resultados ponen de relieve una brecha significativa en el seguimiento y la presentación de informes sobre la calidad de los estudios de investigación-acción. Abordar estas brechas apoyará el desarrollo de futuras investigaciones de acción destinadas a mitigar la falta de calidad asociada con los enfoques de investigación-acción.

Palabras claves: Factores de calidad en la investigación-acción; atención médica**,** revisión panorámica

1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, action research in health professions education has increased significantly, both in practice and publication. Today, a wide variety of health professions research journals have published at least one article that includes some type of action research,

whether a full study or the inclusion of an action research component more commonly within a mixed methods study. Simultaneously, there have been recurrent calls for enhancing quality in action research, taking quality to refer to a grade of excellence. As members of the academic community, we share responsibility for ensuring quality in action research, whether as researchers and practitioners who design and implement research projects, as manuscript reviewers who critique for journals, as colleagues who discuss and learn from each other, or as scholarly practitioners who draw upon results to enhance and innovate clinical practice. Therefore, a scoping review was performed to establish how the quality of action research studies in healthcare is addressed and to summarise standards of quality and suggest best practices for designing, undertaking and reporting high quality action research.

2. Background

Although, Waterman et al., (2001) recognised action research as a promising strategy for organisational change and health care improvement, nevertheless, healthcare systems across the globe are struggling to cope with the dual challenges of emerging and increasing demands and system constraints (WHO, 2016). A systematic review (Montgomery et al., 2015), examined implementing action research in hospital settings and identified action research as having the potential to optimise operational performance by guiding staff toward a salutogenic (as opposed to pathogenic) approach to the organisation. Previous authors, compliment these findings and show that action research has the potential to facilitate organisational change, teamwork and the empowerment of health care professionals in hospitals and communities thus contributing to improvements in the quality of care (Beringer & Fletcher, 2011; Clark, 2009; Moxham et al., 2010; Viswanathan et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2008).

Key tenets of action research can be summarised as follows (Argyris et al., 1985; Coghlan, 2019).

1. It involves tests of change on real issues in socio-ecological systems. It focuses on a particular issue of concern and seeks to resolve the issue.
2. It involves iterative cycles of steps: constructing an issue, planning action, taking action and evaluating action.
3. The intended change typically involves the positive disruption of established patterns of behaviour.
4. It is a participatory and collaborative endeavour undertaken by individuals who share a mutual concern.
5. It contributes simultaneously to basic knowledge in social science and to social action in everyday life.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) preferred to use the term ‘quality’ in action research rather than validity. They suggest the judge for quality action research be on the basis that it develops a praxis of relational knowledge and knowledge generation reflects co-operation between the researcher and participants. Morrison and Lilford (2001) proposed five key tenets of an idealised version of action research, Levin (2003) has four. Eden and Huxham (1996) developed fifteen characteristics of ‘good’ action research, as a checklist to guide thinking about

the design and validity in AR while Pasmore et al. (2008) postulated that action research needs to be rigorous, reflective and relevant. In Bradbury et al (2020) view, there are seven choice points in action research, however she emphasises that it is rare that any one piece of work successfully responds to all choice points equally. Across the action research literature, from Lewin onwards, each of these characteristics have received individual attention but not in a single framework until the work of Shani and Pasmore (1985). In a scoping review protocol (Casey, et al. 2021) the framework by Coghlan and Shani, (2014, 2018) who further developed Shani and Pasmore's work as, it is comprehensive and expresses the relationships between context, quality of relationships, quality of the action process as well as concern for outcomes such as the actionability and contribution to knowledge creation was employed. They describe the core factors for quality as; a real issue in its context; iterative interactions to address the issue and generate knowledge; collaboration between participants and dual outcomes from the action and in knowledge generation.

Coghlan and Shani (2014, 2018) present an action research framework, based on a comprehensive review, analysis and synthesis of published literature and a set of empirical field studies in a variety of organizations. The framework has four factors: context, quality of relationships, quality of the action research process itself and outcomes.

- *Context:* As action research is sourced in local external and internal forces for change, and generates localised theory through localised action, knowledge of context is critical. The context of the action refers to the external business, social and academic environment and to the internal local organizational/discipline environment of a given organization. Knowledge of the scholarly context of prior research in the field of the particular action proposed and to which a contribution is intended is also a prequisite.
- *Quality of relationships:* The quality of relationship between members and between members and researchers is paramount. Action research espouses research *with* people rather than on or for people Hence the relationships need to be managed through building trust, concern for the other, facilitating honest conversations, equality of influence in designing, implementing, evaluating the action and cogenerating the emergent practical knowledge.
- Quality of *the action research process itself:* The quality of the action research process is grounded in the intertwining dual focus on both the action and the inquiry processes as they are enacted in the present tense. The inquiry process is systematic, rigorous and reflective such that it enables members of the organization to develop a deeper level understanding and meaning of a critical issue or phenomenon, as the process unfolds and emergent challenges are confronted.
- *Outcomes:* The dual outcomes of action research are some level of sustainability (human, social, economic, ecological) and the development of self-help and competencies out of the action and the creation of new knowledge from the inquiry.

These four factors comprise a comprehensive framework as they capture the core of action research and the complex cause-and-effect dynamics within each factor and between factors. They provide a unifying lens into wide variety of the reported studies in the literature, whether or not the factors are discussed explicitly and act as a high-level guide for the action researcher. The framework allows the distinct nature of each action research effort to emerge and it consolidates the added value of each study. It stands up to the challenges of action

research values, design, implementation and evaluation, teaching and doctoral examination (Coghlan, Coughlan & Shani, 2019).

These four factors have been framed as a Quality Action Research Checklist (QuARC) (Casey, et al., 2023). This checklist provides a series of questions based on each of the four factors – context, quality of relationships, quality of the action research process itself and the dual outcomes. Application of such checklists affords researchers and other stakeholders with opportunities to understand the importance of providing valid, reliable information on the research to promote useability of the outcomes. Incorporating the key quality factors for action research such as participation, inclusion, co-design with service users in health services research can lead to targeted action and health service reform that matches the needs of service users. This review adds to previous work in this area by providing a comprehensive, chronological update and summary about how quality in action research in healthcare is established across different countries and disciplines.

The review aims to answer the following research questions: How do researchers address the core factors of a comprehensive framework of action research in healthcare? The specific objectives were to identify how

1. knowledge of the practical and academic context are addressed.
2. the quality of co-researcher relationships was maintained and to assess the degree of participation using Arnstein's (1969) tool. This tool provides a typology of citizen participation using examples from three federal social programs: urban renewal, antipoverty and model cities. The typology is arranged in a ladder pattern with eight rungs corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining a plan. There are three categories in Arnstein's typology. The top level is called degrees of citizen power (which includes the rungs of citizen control, delegated power, partnership) enabling those currently excluded to be deliberately included in the future. It highlights that there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process. The middle category addresses degrees of tokenism and includes the rungs of placation, consultation, informing) and the lowest category is called non-participation and includes the rungs of therapy and manipulation. This ladder of participation provided us with an objective gauge for assessing relationships between researchers and organisational participants in the context of looking at the level of participation of the participants in the action research studies.
3. the enactment of cycles of action and reflection in the present tense were described and implemented.
4. the dual outcomes of issue resolution and the co-generation of actionable knowledge are addressed.

3. Methods

This scoping review was conducted to explore the proposed research question. The study was informed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al. (2010), with the following five steps being undertaken: (1) identify the research question, (2) identify relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data and (5) collating, summarizing and reporting the results.

Stakeholders were not consulted in this review (sixth step deemed optional by Levac et al. 2010). We were confident of the reliability and validity of this scoping review process because 1) each of the researchers is a well-established action researcher and 2) by using an objective framework to assess the quality aspects of published studies we were confident of the validity of the review. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were followed using the extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018). This approach provided a systematic and replicable review process, ensuring methodological rigor and reliability. The review protocol was published (Casey et al., 2021).

4. Search Strategy

The four dimensions of quality as identified by Coghlan and Shani, (2014, 2018) informed the search strategy. An expert librarian supported search strategy development of three databases CINAHL – Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL Plus), PubMed – Biomedical and life sciences database and ABI/Inform (ProQuest) – Business database). Using keywords in conjunction with truncation and Boolean operators, these electronic databases were searched as most empirical research work in healthcare would be published in these data bases. The Population, Concept and Context (PCC) framework was used for the search strategy (Peters et al., 2020).

- Population – refers to healthcare professionals and patients and clients who work or come into contact with health care in any context of primary, secondary or tertiary settings.
- Concept – the primary concept of interest in this review was the description of quality criteria in action research studies.
- Context – studies were included if they were conducted in any part of health service in any country that people (healthcare professionals and patient or clients) interact with.

4.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The studies were restricted to peer-reviewed articles published in English before January 2016 to December 2021 as previous scoping review on action research in the healthcare field had been undertaken by Cordeiro and Soares (2018). Therefore, the team considered this 6 year time frame to be sufficient to capture recent publications. Peer reviewed empirical action research studies were included if they reported on the four dimensions of quality as outlined by Coghlan and Shani, (2014, 2018). Searches were limited to studies undertaken in a healthcare environment. An example of a search string is provided in Supplementary file. We also conducted a manual search of *Action Research* and the *Educational Action Research Journal* as we discovered that the former journal was not being included in some databases despite it being stated otherwise. The latter journal we searched manually just in case any healthcare articles relating to action research were available which would usually be in the educational databases and not in the usual healthcare databases. This search added another 40 articles.

4.2. Study screening and data extraction

Rayyan, an online data management system was employed to manage the review process. Article screening and selection was undertaken independently by three of the authors against the eligibility criteria. They met to discuss and resolve any conflicts or disagreements. All the search results were exported to Endnote 9. All duplicates were removed within EndNote X9.

To guide data extraction, the authors developed a standardized data extraction tool as suggested by Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) (Peters et al., 2015). They extracted data from 3 studies to pilot the extraction tool and to ensure consistency and accuracy and no changes were made to the tool. The research team discussed results and continuously updated the data chart in an iterative process. Data was extracted using the following subheadings: Citation details (authors and year of publication), journal title, study title, geographical location of study, study context, study aims, methodology/design and form of action research. The cited quality action research factors in relation to the afore mentioned four factors was also collected. Studies reporting less than the four criteria were excluded from phase two to the data extraction process. This process ensured the most robust and reliable measures were appraised in further detail. This decision was determined following a review of the articles included in phase 1 of the data extraction process.

4.3. Data synthesis and presentation

Due to the aim of this study and the heterogeneity of the articles included a narrative synthesis (Popay et al., 2006) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the findings was the most appropriate approach to examine the review questions. Coghlan and Shani's, (2014, 2018) comprehensive framework supported to structure the narrative synthesis. Results are reported in accordance with PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). We engaged reflectively with the data to find repeated patterns of meaning and connections between categories and subcategories as related to the four quality criteria through the process of constant comparison (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). In an attempt to establish mutual exclusion of each factor, a latent level analysis of the quality criteria was undertaken to look beyond what was being said to try to scrutinize what was behind what is being said (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using the following questions.

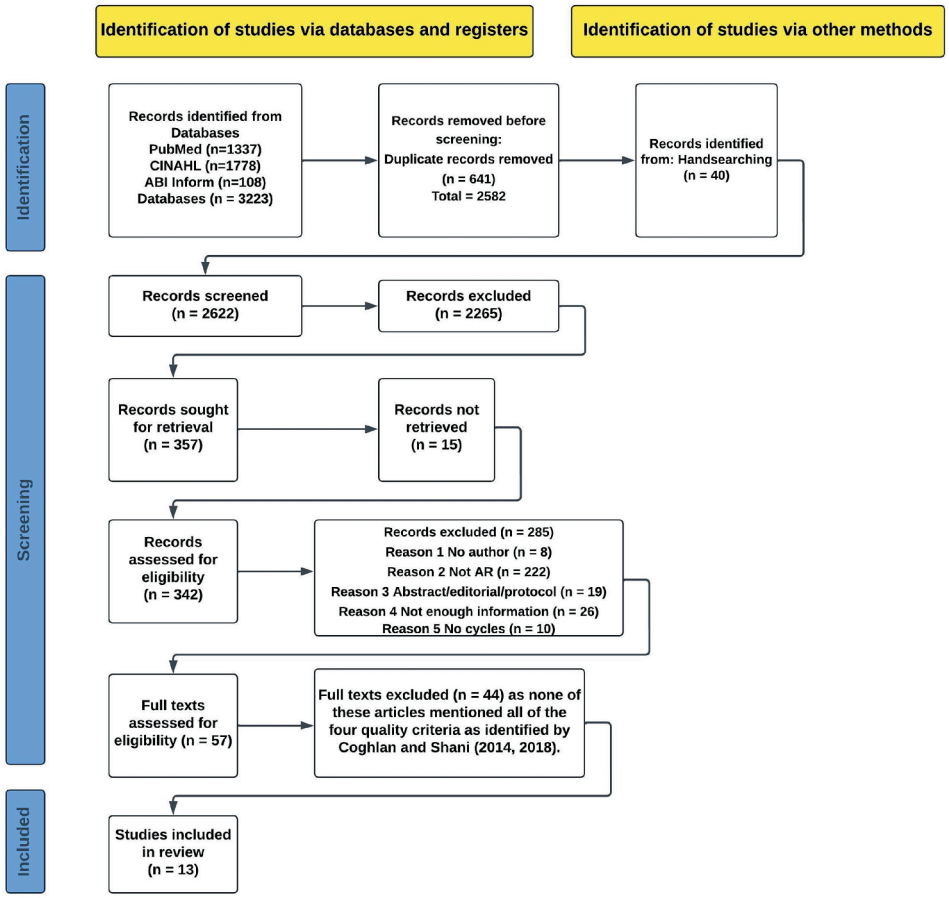
1. Was the contextual data presented in a rigorous, systematic manner so that the rationale for the action and the research was solidly grounded? Was there literature presented to set the context for the study?
2. Was there an explicit discussion of how the action research relationships were formed, built, and sustained, with an account of enablers, obstacles and difficulties that may have arisen. What was the level of participation and was it explicit that participation was maintained in all stages of the research process?
3. Does the account demonstrate a rigorous engagement in the action research project's design, and subsequent enactment of cycles of planning, taking action and reflection so that the path to the organisational and theoretical outcomes is transparent?
4. Are both theoretical and practical outcomes presented? Is the theoretical knowledge beyond the immediacy of the action intention to application to other contexts or recommendations for future research?

Our collective discussions around these four questions guided our analysis which was reviewed and confirmed by all authors at each stage of the analytic process. We used these four quality factors to present our findings on how quality was addressed, and we provide examples from the extracted studies as evidence of findings in the following narrative synthesis.

5. Results

A search of three databases yielded 3,223 studies which were uploaded to EndNote X9 and this was reduced to 2,582 with the removal of duplicates (n=641). After title and abstract screening by the same three researchers 2,265, articles were excluded as not meeting the inclusion criteria. Following this, we engaged in full text screening of the remaining 357 articles and a further 285 articles were excluded because either there was no author, they were not action research, it was not an empirical study, not enough information was provided on quality or it was only a precursory mention without any indication as to how quality was addressed or there was no mention of any action research cycles. The full text article review was undertaken by the authors using the same iterative steps, with each author reviewing the full texts independently and one person acting as chairperson to resolve any disagreements. The total sample for full text assessment was 57, of which 44 were excluded as none of these mentioned all of the four quality criteria as identified by Coghlan and Shani. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow chart



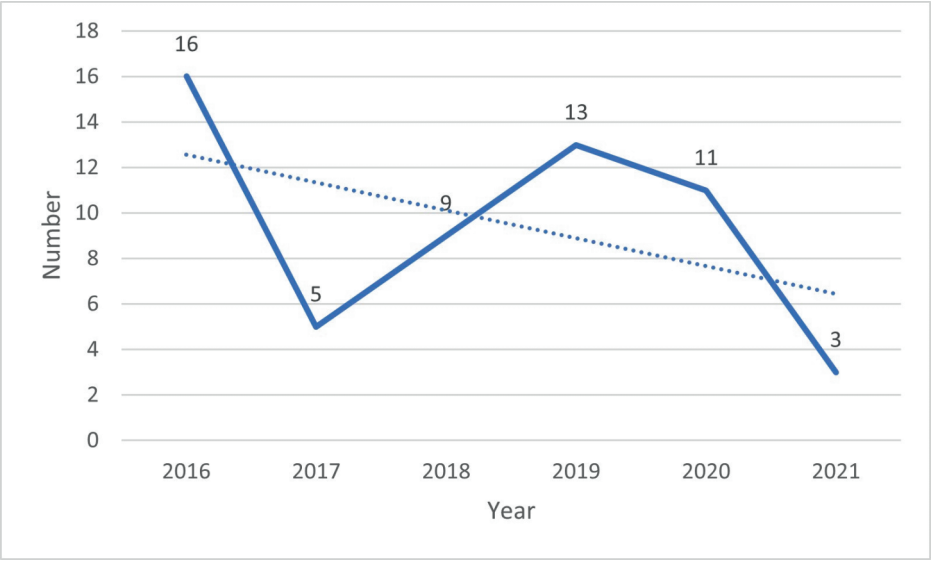
Results were synthesised and reported narratively according to the four quality criteria. A narrative tabular report was produced summarising the extracted data concerning the objectives and scoping review question. This is included for the 57 studies in supplementary information file.

6. Characteristics of included articles

The number of citations of the 57 papers included in this review was used as a measure of impact as per Martin (1996). The most cited papers were Cardiff et al., 2018 (54), Skene et al., 2019 (31), and Kwong et al., 2016 (31).

Most publications were in 2016 (n=16; 28%) with a declining trend over the five-year time period as shown in Figure 2.

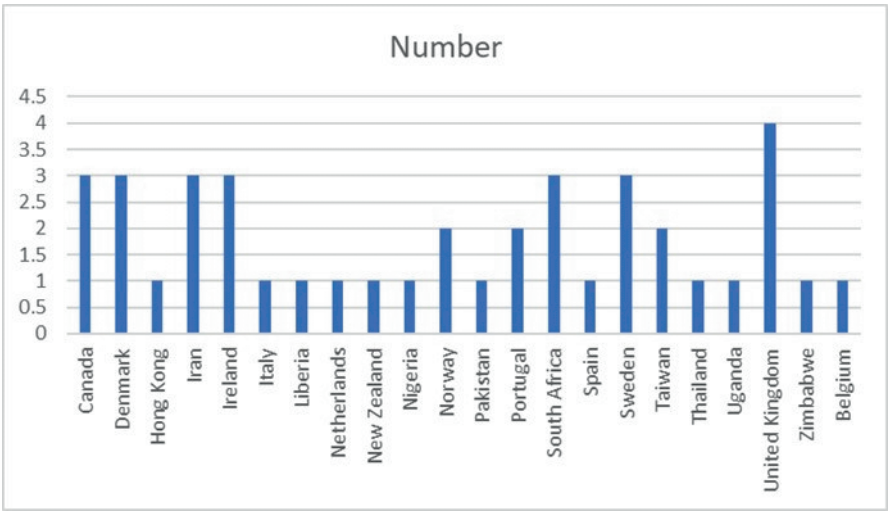
Figure 2: Number of Action Research Publications per annum



The most common journal of publication was *Action Research* (9; 16%) followed by *African Journal of Primary Health Care Family Medicine* (3; 0.05%), *Journal of Clinical Nursing* (3; 0.05%) and the *Journal of Nursing Management* (3; 0.05%). Nursing journals were by far the commonest type of journal publication. Thirty studies (53%) involved nursing or midwifery, 19 (33%) included different members of the multi-disciplinary team, 4 (0.07%) engaged with patients or citizens, 1 (0.02%) related to occupational therapists, 1 (0.02%) involved undergraduate medical students, 1 (0.02%) concerned locally based R&D units and 1 did not state participants.

Of the 57 publications continent of origin, 26 (46%) were from Europe, 11 (19%) from Asia, 8 (14%) from Africa, 6 (10%) were from the continent of Australia; 1 (0.02%) from Zealandia and 5 (0.09%) from North America. Figure 3 presents an overview of the country of publication.

Figure 3: Country of Publication of Action Research Studies



In relation to study context, of the 57 studies, 31 (54%) were hospital based, 10 (17.5%) were based in the community, 7 (12%) in an aged care residential or nursing home facility, 2 (0.04%) in a health system, 1 (0.02%) in a higher education institution, 1 (0.02%) in a hospice, 1 (0.02%) in a primary school, 1 (0.02%) in a defined geographical area, 1 (0.02%) was online and 2 (0.04%) did not state setting.

7. Narrative synthesis

Given the heterogeneity of the included studies and their relevant quality criteria are described in the following narrative synthesis using Coghlan and Shani's comprehensive framework. This framework assessed all dimensions of quality including level of participation using Arnstein's (1969) and provided comprehensive evaluation. Of the 57 publications, Table 1 shows the description of the quality criteria for all thirteen studies that mentioned all the four quality criteria selected for analysis.

7.1. Assessment of context

Although all papers made some reference to setting and situated the research against a backdrop of some form of evidence synthesis, very few reflected on how context shaped behaviours. Several papers demonstrate an analytic perspective on context. For example, Hansson et al. (2017) provided a comprehensive description of the global and national context as well as individual factors of researchers and participants in their development of a change facilitation approach for a local R&D unit in Sweden. Ericson-Lindman and Strandberg (2018) offered a rich description of the phenomenon of study (dealing with troubled con-

Table 1: Summary of Papers Reporting all Four Factors

Author(s)	Context	Quality of Relationships	Quality of AR Process	Outcomes	Arnstein's (1969) level of Participation
Kwong et al., (2016)	Developing protocol for preventing pressure ulcers (PUs) in private for-profit nursing homes in Hong Kong.	Focus group interviews with staff. Participants not included in the analysis of the data.	Three cyclical stages and steps: unfreezing (planning), changing (action), and refreezing (results)	Developed the protocol and implemented same and discussed rigor in the context of criteria for qualitative research	Citizen Power
Padilha et al, 2016	Develop self-managed for COPD. Contributing to knowledge of COPD	Role of co-researchers discussed explicitly.	Cycles of problem-solving & addressing research questions	(1) Change made in care delivery. (2) Knowledge of self-managed-care kin COPD	Citizen Power
Broom et al, 2017	Transitioning from an open-plan to a two-cot neonatal in Australian regional neonatal intensive care unit.	Participatory action research methodology enabled the inclusion of staff.	Over 4 years a collaborative, cyclical process of planning, gathering data, taking action and reviewing the results to plan the next action.	Findings include (1) a description of how action research cycles were used: (2) evaluations of participatory action research methodology.	Citizen Power
Hansson, Hoog and Nystrom (2017	Concerns for health and social service providers for innovative solutions to ensure service quality and efficient use of scarce resources.	Researchers themselves formed the research team.	Five phases in the development loop, describing change and development (e.g., Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles).	Enhanced understanding of key components of action research to better manage change in health and social care.	Citizen Power
Cardiff, et al., 2018	Developing reflection on leadership practice Application of person-centred practice to nursing leadership	Engagement of co-researcher as both subjects and co-researchers explicit.	Cycles of action & reflection in 4 spirals over 3 years	(1) Practical outcomes described (2) Conceptual framework for person-centred nurse leadership created.	Citizen Power

Author(s)	Context	Quality of Relationships	Quality of AR Process	Outcomes	Arnstein's (1969) level of Participation
Ericson-Lindman and Strandberg (2018)	Relieve and prevent care providers' burden and troubled conscience in care for older people	PAR researchers as the bridge between the care providers and management.	Model of problem processing to support PAR process of think, look and act over 2 years	(1) Permanent change in the activities involved & (2) suggesting valid application in other similar contexts and in other countries.	Citizen Power
Jones et al., (2018)	In context of Ebola crisis in Liberia, hospital which lost staff and became a holding facility for suspected cases, prompting violent hostility from the surrounding community.	PAR used to design a protocol and included stakeholder groups affected by maternal health services or important actors of change in the system. All participants were involved at each step.	PAR cycles enacted across 3 stages	(1) Development of understanding and (2) meaningful links between health workers and community members.	Citizen Power
Madden et al., 2018	Context of PMH and of the practical challenges confronting professionals	2 midwives groups explored their experiences & co-inquired together with voices explicit.	Cycles of co-inquiry described with each one feeding into the subsequent ones	(1) Referral pathway developed for PMH patients & (2) Knowledge for midwife education re PMH	Citizen Power
Casey et al., 2019	Creating an analytic instrument for evaluation & development Instrument for generalised use	Collaboration across institutions.	3 cycles with each one feeding into the subsequent ones	(1) Instrument created (2) Instrument for generalised use in health policy development and evaluation.	Citizen Power
Hung et al., (2019)	Creating website providing medical information, psychological support, and decision-related simulation	Meetings mostly with professionals and interviews with women who underwent surgery for breast	Enacted cycles of with multigroup teamwork via regular team meetings.	Development of website	Citizen Power

Author(s)	Context	Quality of Relationships	Quality of AR Process	Outcomes	Arnstein's (1969) level of Participation
	for women during breast cancer in Taiwan	cancer who did not form part of the research team.			
Mann & Hung, 2019	General context of dementia treatment& local case.	Collaboration between a dementia sufferer and clinician discussed.	Cycles within 3 phases with each cycle feeding into the subsequent ones.	(1) Reflection on local case. (2) General application of the role of dementia sufferers in care.	Citizen Power
van Biljon et al, 2019	Centrality of motor vehicle driving for employability in South Africa and role of occupational therapists in assessing fitness to drive.	Explores power relations with the team.	Over 5 years, a collaborative task team applied multiple ALAR cycles to address the problem.	(1) Addressing practice problem User manual. (2) tool developed and used to screen driver fitness for occupational therapists.	Citizen Power
Kramer-Roy, et al., 2020;	Context of education & occupational therapy in Pakistan Practical issues in educational setting	Inter-professional collaboration between OTs and teachers described.	Cycles of plan-act-observe described with each one feeding into the subsequent ones	(1) Outcomes for students (2) General implications for OT education.	Citizen Power

science in residential care of older people) with particular emphasis on individual factors of researchers and participants. Jones et al. (2018) had less emphasis on individual factors but a presented a detailed description of pre and post Ebola Liberian maternity services and the consequences for pregnant women. Casey and colleagues (2019) contributed a thorough description of policy development and analysis internationally. In the context, they set the scene for the development of their health-related policy analysis tool with a description of external and internal factors. Mann and Hung (2019) painted a thorough portrait of the external, organisational and individual factors in their description of co-research with people living with dementia. Kramer-Roy et al., (2020) detailed the national environmental, organisational and individual factors (collaboration between occupational therapists and teachers) that impacted on developing the role of occupational therapists in school-based practice in Pakistan.

7.2. Assessment of the quality of relationships

A wide disparity of understanding the nature and practice of collaboration was found in relation to this factor. For example, although not specifically mentioning trust, Padilha et al. (2016) commented on the support and mediator role of the researcher, creating a safe space and identifying common interests and goals in their research on improving self-care management in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patients. While the analysis did not involve the nurses or patients, the interpretation of the data was undertaken in collaboration with the nurses. The nature of collaborative involvement was at the highest level of Arnstein's (1969) ladder. Broom et al., (2017) indicated that all medical, nursing and allied health personnel in the Neonatal Intensive care Unit (NICU) were invited to participate in the study and were engaged in every stage of data generation, analysis and interpretation which would represent 'citizen power' level of participation. Ericson-Lindman and Strandberg (2018, p.199) made it clear that "all participants had an equal say in the process" and after each session they systematically summarised the session with the participants providing an example of citizen power. Likewise, Jones et al. (2018) involved all participants at each step giving a high level of participation.

Madden et al., (2017, p. 563) used cooperative inquiry to support women with mental health concerns during pregnancy and "all co-researchers offered feedback on their interpretations of emerging themes between meetings" indicating citizen power. Casey et al. (2019) involved participants from four higher education institutions throughout the project giving citizen power to participants to shape the final outcome. Hung et al. (2019) held many meetings mostly with professionals and undertook interviews with women who underwent surgery for breast cancer to help develop a decision-aid website. While there was a high level of participation in this study, these people did not form part of the research team and data were qualitatively analysed presumably by the research team although it is not actually specified. Mann and Hung (2019) involved patients and an interdisciplinary staff to improve dementia care in a medical unit giving a high level of participation. Assessing fitness to drive to promote employability using action learning action research cycles constituted the work of van Biljon, et al, (2019) using five stakeholder groups. Participants as co researchers were included throughout the project. It is clear that a ground-up approach, in achieving change through research and action was undertaken in these studies (Padilha et al., 2016; Broom 2017;

Ericson-Lindman and Strandberg 2018; Jones et al., 2018; Madden et al., 2017; Casey et al., 2019); Mann and Hung 2019; van Biljon, et al., (2019) and this provided a shared understanding of the issues, equality of influence, shared planning, trust, shared language, taking joint action and a shared evaluation.

In just about one third of studies, inclusion of participants was mostly at the beginning of the study. For example, Kwong et al. (2016) set out to change the practices on the prevention of pressure ulcers and to develop a pressure ulcer protocol. Interview data were analysed and interpreted for the action team which consisted of four staff representatives, two nurses and an author. There was no mention of including residents in making sense of the data. Similarly, Hansson et al's (2017) study suggested a high level of participation but only the researchers themselves formed the research team. There was no mention of who actually did the analysis. A general study design was collaboratively agreed with the unit team which consisted of the manager, two charge nurses and later two primary nurses in Cardiff et al.'s (2018) study of person-centred leadership giving a high level of participation. Finally, in Kramer-Roy et al.'s (2020) study, only the research team undertook data analysis. Nevertheless, there was a high level of collaboration between health and education professionals in the early stages of the project.

7.3. Assessment of the quality of the action research process

The enactment of iterative cycles of collaborative planning, taking joint action and co-evaluating action mark the progress of this factor. All thirteen articles referred to using cycles of action and reflection and how each cycle led into the subsequent one. Cardiff et al., 2018; and Kramer-Roy et al., 2020 provided continuous cycles in diagrammatic figures to provide a visual map of the action research cycles. In others (Ericson-Lindman et al., 2016; Kwong, et al., 2016), written descriptions were relied on to document experiences of collaboration as the researchers moved through stages of their project. Kramer-Roy et al. (2020) used the plan-act-observe framing of cycles while Kwong et al. (2016) structured the account of their action research project in terms of Lewin's three stages of change- unfreezing, changing and re-freezing – and described these three stages through three steps, namely, planning, action, and the results.

7.4. Assessment of outcomes

While all the studies presented practical outcomes transferable knowledge to other settings was often missing. Kwong et al., (2016) developed and implemented a preventive pressure ulcers protocol, and discussed how it might be applied across the National Health Services, thus offering generalisable practical knowledge. Outcomes from Hansson et al. (2017) suggested that the change process had helped the Research & Development unit to progress by expanding its scope and contributed to the R&D unit being considered a key agency in the region. They did not offer any transfer of this learning to other settings. Padilha et al. (2016) suggested that their findings contributed an approach to change in health and social care. Mann and Hung (2019) offered their learnings and practical tips to encourage more collaboration between researchers and people with dementia in undertaking action research to make

social change. Casey et al. (2019) generated a policy instrument for an audience beyond the immediacy of the situation while Hung et al. (2019) developed a website and evaluated it. However, the focus is only on the practical outcomes of study namely the creation of a website. Jones et al. (2018) strengthened communication between a hospital and its surrounding community. There was no sense of what action was taken or its contribution to increasing theoretical knowledge.

8. Discussion

The aim of this scoping review was to identify and appraise the existing measures of assessing quality in action research studies using Coghlan and Shani's, (2014, 2018) framework and to present a narrative synthesis. No previous literature review has investigated and synthesised how researchers have attended to quality in action research primary studies which is a significant gap in the literature. This review suggest that the quality of reporting is problematic in this emerging field of establishing quality in action research. While all 13 studies included in this review reported on the four quality factors, no study reported in any great detail on how any of the factors were integrated. This highlights a significant gap in the monitoring and reporting on the quality of action research studies as it is not enough to discuss the four factors but that each factor be discussed explicitly in itself and in relation to each of the others (Shani and Coghlan, 2021).

8.1. Application of quality criteria

In the main the quality of the relationships was clearly manifest, in participation in data collection processes or meetings. However, few authors actually described how researchers incorporate disparate input from different participants that share a problem and participate in the same study. It is true that social relations are inherently political and inevitably based on power differences, however, no such type of discussions materialised in any of the 13 selected articles. As stated, one third of the studies involved participants in the early stages of the research process but not with data analysis. In some situations, this is understandable as the degree of participation and quality of relationships also relates to participants' capacity or levels of expertise therefore compromising the implementation of quality criteria of the action research approach can be challenging (Castleden et al., 2012; DiStefano et al., 2013). In addition, most engagement with data analysis was seen as a qualitative activity in the form of thematic or content analysis. This is an important issue and perhaps contributes to the tendency to classify action research as a qualitative methodology. These findings have international application for action researchers, academics and indeed practitioners to increase visibility and manifestation of how their studies were rigorously conducted.

8.2. The need to address quality in action research studies

There is a requirement and an ethical obligation to demonstrate the rigour of the action research process (Brydon-Miller, 2008, 2009), it is important therefore that the approach is appropriately described in the context of an action research paradigm. Two key principles of reporting research include the requirement for authors "to describe their methods clearly and unambiguously so that their findings can be confirmed by others", and that "researchers should follow applicable reporting guidelines…publications should provide sufficient detail to permit [replication] by other researchers" (Altman & Moher, 2014, p. 7). Inadequate reporting of research projects to participants, academics and to the general public is a concern across the research landscape (Taylor, 2019). Reporting on how quality was addressed in action research studies provides evidence for adequately detailing the methods and results of research (Altman & Moher, 2014). It is not sufficient to demonstrate only that a successful solution has been developed although this may be most attractive to managers and practitioners. As action research aims at a dual outcome: the successful addressing of the organisational/service issue identified in the context and the co-generation of practical knowledge or actionable theory for an audience beyond those directly engaged a discussion section is an essential requirement of an action research study report. Such discussion sections were somewhat limited in many of the studies included in the review. It is *sine qua non* therefore that all action researchers must not only provide a rationale for their selected research approach and particular modality, a review of current knowledge, a statement of their role and positionality. They must also provide the evidence to support the implementation of quality criteria of their action research studies including a discussion on practical and theoretical outcomes thereby closing the learning loop and shifting the study to a new level of learning.

This review provides examples of how the application of quality criteria gave voice to people from populations who are vulnerable for example those at risk of developing pressure ulcers in nursing homes (Kwong et al., 2016), or have the potential to be marginalised such as older people (Ericson-Lindman and Strandberg, 2018) or incur stigmatization as a result of caring for Ebola patients (Jones et al., 2018) or who had medical conditions such as COPD (Padilha et al., 2016, or needing dementia treatment (Mann & Hung, 2019) or for assessing fitness to drive to promote employability (van Biljon, et al. 2019). Undertaking research with people rather than on or for people is critically important in healthcare settings to reduce marginalisation and stigma, to increase engagement with health services and to design appropriate solutions to healthcare issues that are respectful, acceptable, evidence-based and effective (Millum et al., 2019). Hence the challenge for action researchers is to engage in both taking action and contributing to practice and reflecting on the outcomes in order to contribute theory to the body of knowledge identified in the context. The practical outcomes were more obvious than theoretical outcomes perhaps, in our view, this is because of an over emphasis on finding a practical solution and forgetting considerations of future learning.

8.3. Limitations

Despite the final search yielding thousands of articles, the endeavour to use an objective quality framework and a specific search strategy increases the possibility that relevant articles may have been omitted from this review. The inclusion of purely empirical studies heightens

the risk of publication bias. However, we hope to have limited the impact of these challenges and present a comprehensive synthesis in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR Guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018).

9. Conclusion

This review set out to systematically identify and critically appraise extant measures that assess the quality of action research. The review reveals some promising measures to assess the four dimensions of quality outlined by Coghlan and Shani's, (2014, 2018). It is clear that a bottom-up approach such as action research, when successfully applied, achieved greater commitment from the organisational members and therefore is more likely to lead to sustainable change.

Perhaps it's the continued unfamiliarity, quasi novelty of this research, a general lack of awareness and education about quality criteria, an undervaluing of reporting guidelines, that so few articles could be included in this review. The lack of availability of an appropriate guideline for action research as highlighted by Casey et al. (2023) also contributes to this paucity. This review has identified that greater emphasis is required on demonstrating the quality of action research studies in the design, implementation and evaluation of an action research initiative. Our recommendation is for authors to select an established reporting guideline or checklist that specifically aligns with action research. Such application would help to improve the quality of action research initiatives and publications. As this is a relatively recent field of study, future research could explore the impact of using quality checklist such as the Quality Action Research Checklist QuARC (Casey et al. 2023) and note the growth in more explicit discussions on all relevant quality in action research.

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From Participatory Research to the Co-construction of Actions – Reflections on how to Reinforce Action Research for Social Inclusion

Isabel Heck

Abstract: An important part of the action research literature focuses on the participatory dimension of the research process and is much less explicit on the connection of research and action or on how researchers contribute to tangible transformations, in particular outside organizational or education settings. Drawing from seven years of experience as an action researcher within an anti-poverty organization dedicated to improving living conditions in a low-income neighborhood in Montreal (Canada), this article seeks to enhance our comprehension of how action researchers can more effectively contribute to transformational action. Our study identifies four primary functions of research within the examined model and underscores three core characteristics to strengthen the integration of knowledge production and action. These characteristics encompass expanding the role of researchers to actively participate in both the co-development and implementation of action; engaging in long-term commitments and partnerships in a given setting, preferably being even a researcher based in the setting; and fostering collaborations with universities. By elucidating these key elements, this article intends to offer insights into improving the impact of action research, ultimately advancing our ability to contribute to transformative change for more inclusive and sustainable societies.

Keywords: Action research, co-construction, reflective practice, social change, social inclusion, Montreal, Canada

De la investigación participativa a la co-construcción de acciones – Reflexiones sobre cómo reforzar la investigación acción para la inclusión social

Resumen: Una parte importante de la literatura sobre investigación-acción se centra en la dimensión participativa del proceso de investigación y es mucho menos explícita en la conexión entre la investigación y la acción o en cómo las personas investigadoras contribuyen a transformaciones tangibles, en particular fuera de los entornos organizacionales o educativos. A partir de siete años de experiencia como investigadora en la acción dentro de una organización contra la pobreza dedicada a mejorar las condiciones de vida en un vecindario de bajos ingresos en Montreal (Canadá), este artículo busca mejorar nuestra comprensión de cómo las personas investigadoras en la acción pueden contribuir de manera más efectiva a la transformación. Nuestro estudio identifica cuatro funciones principales de la investigación dentro del modelo examinado y subraya tres características centrales para fortalecer la integración de la producción de conocimiento y la acción. Estas características abarcan ampliar el papel de las personas investigadoras para que participen activamente tanto en el codesarrollo como en la implementación de acciones; participar en compromisos y asociaciones a largo plazo en un entorno determinado, preferiblemente como persona investigadora local; y fomentar cola-

boraciones con las universidades. Al dilucidar estos elementos clave, este artículo pretende ofrecer ideas para mejorar el impacto de la investigación-acción y, en última instancia, mejorar nuestra capacidad de contribuir al cambio transformador para sociedades más inclusivas y sostenibles.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, co-construcción, práctica reflexiva, cambio social, inclusión social, Montreal, Canadá

De la recherche participative à la coconstruction d'actions – Pistes de réflexion pour renforcer la recherche-action pour l'inclusion sociale

Résumé: Une part considérable de la littérature sur la recherche-action est axée sur la dimension participative du processus de recherche et aborde peu le lien entre la recherche et l'action ou sur la façon dont les chercheur·e·s contribuent à des transformations tangibles. Cela est particulièrement le cas pour les recherches qui se situent en dehors des contextes organisationnels ou éducatifs. Cet article vise à améliorer notre compréhension de comment les chercheur·e·s peuvent contribuer plus efficacement à l'action transformatrice, en nous appuyant sur notre expérience comme chercheure ancrée au sein d'un organisme de lutte contre la pauvreté à Montréal (Canada). Nous identifions quatre fonctions principales de la recherche dans le modèle examiné et soulignons trois caractéristiques clef pour renforcer l'imbrication entre la production de connaissances et de l'action. Ces caractéristiques consistent à élargir le rôle des chercheur·e·s jusqu'à l'élaboration et à la mise en œuvre d'actions, à investir des engagements et des partenariats avec des acteurs terrain à long terme, pouvant aller jusqu'à un ancrage même de la recherche sur le terrain, et, finalement, à bâtir des partenariats avec les universités. En abordant ces éléments clés, cet article entend offrir des perspectives pour améliorer les retombées de la recherche-action et renforcer ainsi notre capacité à contribuer à transformations sociales vers un monde plus inclusif et durable.

Mots-clefs: Recherche-action, coconstruction, réflexivité, changement social, inclusion sociale, Montréal, Canada

1. Introduction

The goal of action research is to resolve a specific problem in a given social setting through collaborative and iterative processes between knowledge production and transformative action. Action research "ultimately exists to enhance the capacity of everyone to play a significant role in determining the conditions of their own lives" (Fricke et al., 2022:15), underscoring a commitment for empowerment, democracy and social justice. While there is a great variety of approaches in action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2015; Anadon and Savoie-Zajc, 2007), most have in common to be much more explicit on the research than the action component. There is detailed literature of how to engage communities as active participants in knowledge production through participatory methods (such as Gélineau et al., 2024; Skelton et al., 2024; Fanjoy and Bragg, 2019; Fine and Torre, 2021; Larsson and

Nordmark, 2016; Tossavainen, 2017). Often-cited key elements for success of action research are participative processes through the different steps of the research starting with the needs of the stakeholders, but also fostering trust and long-term partnerships between researchers and stakeholders. Many of these studies highlight the transformative experience and empowerment reported by people engaged in Participatory Action Research (PAR). Tailoring research processes where experiential knowledge is valued contributes to greater epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007; Godrie and Dos Santos, 2017), where different types of knowledge count, in particular those of knowledge bearers whose voices are rarely considered in decision-making. Although the attempts to not only understand, but also address complex social problems are certainly widespread, a survey of peer-reviewed articles on participatory approaches to knowledge production to create change in 2018, revealed that "[o]nly 14 of the 236 articles (6%) stated a specific action or outcome that occurred as a result of [collaborative change research, evaluation and design]" (Busch et al., 2019: 15). Some action research projects certainly have tangible outcomes beyond the research process, leading to concrete changes in organizations and territorial development (Fricke et al., 2022), while others, like ATD Fourth World, exert significant political influence (Skelton et al., 2024). However, there is not only a lack of attention to outcomes in the literature, but also to sharing knowledge on how to leverage the contribution of knowledge mobilization for concrete and tangible changes in society.

Theoretically, there is an iterative process between knowledge production, change and reflection on the process, however, many obstacles come in the way to implement these cycles in practice. Bringing about change is always a complex endeavor, and even more so while working outside organizational settings. While working on the transformation of a neighborhood and even more broadly, improving living conditions, there is not a team of directors who can approve or not the suggestions made by the employees as in organizational action research, nor teachers who can change their methods in the classroom as in educational action research. There is very little control over the environment and the actors, while working in community settings. In addition, the conditions in which community organizations operate, with limited and mostly oriented funding and often pressured to respond to urgent need of citizens, are another hurdle in working for deeper systemic change (Heck et al., 2022; Imagine Canada, 2021; Couturier and Fortin, 2021). How can we adjust our roles and processes to facilitate that the epistemic power gained in participatory research by equity-seeking groups is retained beyond the research process?

In this paper, we would like to contribute to the discussion of how we can, as action researchers, facilitate the implementation of change as a result of action research. Based on the experience of the Parole d'excluEs' University Incubator (IUPE), a practice-oriented action-research unit, linked to an anti-poverty organization in Montreal, we have identified four functions of research that are linked to three underlying core characteristics that facilitate the implementation of change linked to a knowledge mobilization process. After a presentation of the methods used and the context of our case, we will present the four functions through concrete examples and then discuss the underlying characteristics that allow for a stronger integration of research and action. We will close with limits and perspectives on how to go further.

2. Methods

The findings of this article are largely based on the author's experience of more than seven years leading Parole d'excluEs' University Incubator and working as a community-based researcher in the eponymous nonprofit organization, from 2013 to 2021.

At Parole d'excluEs, we have, over the years, systematized the model and contributions of the University Incubator (Heck, 2017, Fontan & Heck, 2017; Pozzebon, Tello-Rozas & Heck, 2021) and engaged in many conversations on action research and community-based research on a local, national and international level, which greatly helped us to understand both the specificities of the model and the parallels with other action-research initiatives. We have carried out a large number of studies, some of which had a strong reflective component on the role of research. For instance, we have analyzed the roles and contributions of different stakeholders in the projects that emerged from Parole d'excluEs' model, to better understand how residents, practitioners and researchers participate in the different dimensions and stages of nine different projects (Heck and Socquet-Juglard, 2019). Some elements, such as the four main functions of research, have been elaborated in Heck (2017) and presented and discussed many times both with community members and academics engaged in action research. Two years after leaving the position at Parole d'excluEs, we have gained a greater distance to the experience and added the three core characteristics. A preliminary version of this article has been shared in early 2024 with several staff members, stakeholders and researchers, their comments have been integrated in the final version of the paper, some of which as quotes from a group discussion.[1]

3. Genesis and Evolution of the IUPE Model

Parole d'excluEs' University Incubator was founded by Jean-Marc Fontan and Joseph-Pierre Ulysses, professors of two different universities in Montreal, to support the anti-poverty organization Parole d'excluEs. Parole d'excluEs (litt: the word of the excluded) itself was founded in 2006 in Montreal, Canada, by a collective of activists led by Patrice Rodriguez, a pioneer of civil society organizations in Montreal. Their motive was to develop innovative ways of fighting against social exclusion and poverty by encouraging people with lived experience to speak out and take action collectively, proposing thus an alternative to the dominant model of service delivery, in which people with lived experience of poverty are rarely included in decision making. Just as the feminist movement cannot be imagined without the participation of women, in Parole d'excluEs' (PE) vision, citizens with lived experience of poverty and social exclusion need to be at the forefront, and their knowledge and experience need to be heard to bring along transformations towards a more inclusive and equal society.

1 We would like to thank first and foremost Florianne Socquet-Juglard with whom the idea of this text was developed while still working at Parole d'excluEs. We also wish to thank Jean-Marc Fontan, Vincent van Schendel, Grégoire Autin, Mathilde Manon, Nomez Najac, Marie-Claude Fournier and Hoda Essassi, for their discussions, testimonials and/or comments that nurtured the analysis of this article, as well as Miren Larrea and Werner Fricke for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of the paper. All errors or omissions are solely the responsibility of the author.

The centrality of experiential knowledge starts with how PE, as an exogenous actor, identifies its priorities. When settling in a neighborhood, the organization builds its agenda on community priorities: The first step is to invite the neighborhood's residents to take part in participatory action research where they share their needs and aspirations. The research findings present a collective vision of what the community wants to transform and are validated in a citizens[2]' assembly, to make sure that they resonate with the community. Residents are then invited to mobilize and take action to tackle the challenges identified in the study. From there, projects are codeveloped jointly with the citizens, practitioners and researchers, with the support of Parole d'excluEs, and if needed, subsequent cycles of knowledge production and action are initiated. Many initiatives have emerged from this approach, including an alternative food system, a daycare facility, collective outdoor spaces, a citizens' health space, artistic productions, and projects and direct action to fight against the digital divide (Parole d'excluEs, 2019).

Previously established in three low-income areas in Montreal, Parole d'excluEs has centered its activities in the Montreal-North neighborhood since 2017. The sector in which the organization was most invested during the period we participated in the project is the Northeastern district of Montreal-North, a sector of about 10'000 inhabitants characterized by a young and ethnically diverse population, but also by high poverty rates (Statistics Canada, 2023). The ratio of individuals without high school diplomas, and the number of single-parent families in the Northeast area of Montreal-North are also significantly higher than Montreal's figures (53% and 37% vs. 31% and 15% for Montreal, Statistics Canada, 2023). Montreal-North, and in particular its Northeastern District often make headlines in the news associated with gang-related gun violence (Vogler, 2020). The organization has a physical presence in the neighborhoods through community centres located in housing projects, which are the main space to develop collective action (Pozzebon et al., 2021; Fontan, 2017, for a description of the PE model).

The idea of integrating researchers in the PE model was inspired by Brazilian Technological Incubator of Popular Cooperatives, which the founder of Parole d'excluEs encountered during a sabbatical period in Brazil and Argentina. However, the mission and model had to be adapted to the Montrealer context, as unlike Brazilian incubators, PE did not work with already organized collectives, but rather tried to spark citizens' engagement. Jean-Marc Fontan, co-founder of the University Incubator of Parole d'excluEs explains:

"J'ai proposé [à Patrice, le fondateur de PE] de faire un Incubateur universitaire Parole d'excluEs, de mettre sur pied une structure en appui au travail qui se faisait sur le terrain. On était en amont [de la mobilisation] mais eux [au Brésil], ils ne pouvaient pas nous aider sur comment travailler et c'est là qu'il a fallu inventer tout. Donc on est retourné à la base : à ATD Quart Monde avec le croisement des savoirs, moi avec la toute la recherche qui a été faite sur le mouvement pragmatiste aux États-Unis, pour comprendre qu'est ce qui se passait dans l'action, ce qui m'a amené aux premières expériences des University Settlements. Et là on s'est rendu compte qu'au fond on était en train de redécouvrir des choses que des gens, presque un siècle [plus tôt], avaient commencé à travailler parce qu'ils jugeaient que c'était comme ça qu'il fallait travailler. C'est un peu ça la formation, la dimension universitaire de l'IUPE, qui s'est greffée à une intuition qui était portée par un acteur."[3]

2 Residents and citizens are used interchangeably in this article.

3 "I suggested [to Patrice, PE's founder] that we set up a Parole d'excluEs university incubator, a structure to support the work being done in the field. We were ahead [of the mobilization] so they [in Brazil] couldn't help us on how to work and that's when we [realized we] had to invent everything. So we went back to basics: to ATD Fourth World with [their approach of] merging knowledge, myself with all the research that had been done on the pragmatist movement in the United States, to understand what was happening in action, which led me to the first experiences of the University Settlements. That's when we realized that we were basically rediscovering things

Studying these different approaches to knowledge production within the community (Longtin, 2010; Fontan, Longtin et al., 2014, Cormier, 2012) helped to articulate the epistemological posture of the IUPE, valuing experiential, practical and academic knowledge and underscoring the importance of collaborative and engaged research with communities to support transformative action.

In the first years (2007–2013), the IUPE thus was led by sociologist Jean-Marc Fontan, a university professor with very strong expertise in community-based research. He mobilized other academics as well as students to be part of the unit. Although many of its members were very engaged in the field, the academics' other responsibilities did not allow them to be as fully present to train and oversee the students and interns and adapt the research process to the evolving needs and agendas of the community. After years of searching for funding, a grant from philanthropy led to the creation of the position of a community-based researcher, and eventually a research section, within the organization Parole d'excluEs (Fontan and Heck, 2017) in 2013. This opened up new possibilities and a more organic way to co-develop research, departing from a dynamic where PE asked for studies where results were not always translated into actions, as Fontan recalls:

"PE n'était pas [toujours] capable de prendre les résultats qu'on avait. Il y avait de l'apprentissage à faire, mais c'est comme s'ils ne savaient pas trop quoi faire avec ça. La jonction organique ne s'est réellement faite que quand toi [l'auteure de l'article] tu es arrivée."[4]

4. Roles and Functions of Research in the IUPE Model

Having a research unit within the organization strongly contributed to shift the IUPE to a community-led unit, with the academics being in a role of support (*ibid*). This configuration is quite rare; a global survey of university-community partnerships by Hall et al. (2015) has shown that academics tend to conserve leadership in community-based research projects. The current situation is in contrast with the roots of PAR, strongly embedded in social movements and civil society organizations in the South (Hall and Tandon, 2017).

Being based in a community organization rather than a university setting means that our daily collaborators are practitioners, activists and people directly experiencing issues of poverty and exclusion. This dynamic fundamentally alters our ways of working, as our primary aim is to contribute to social transformation through knowledge production and mobilization. It shifts our research posture and practice echoing closely Fals Borda's (1996) approach of participatory action research.

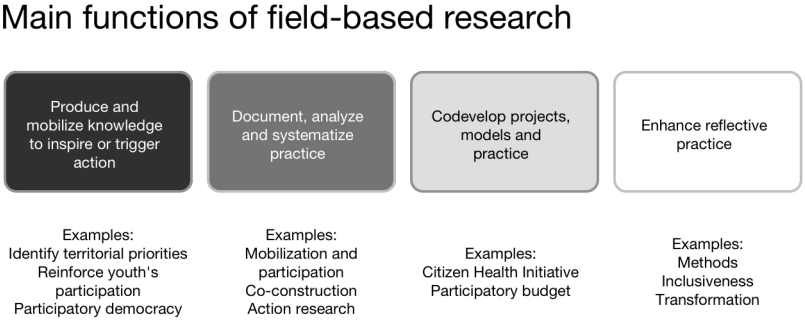
Furthermore, not being bound to academic duties gives us considerable leeway to orient the design, rhythm, modes of knowledge production and dissemination, all aimed at facilitating its use by social actors striving for tangible change. Moreover, our active presence in the field beyond the studies, in places of consultation, action and reflection is a very important leverage to facilitate the appropriation of the results. On one hand, we are not facing the

that people had started to work on, almost a century [earlier], because they felt that was the right thing to do. This is how the university dimension of IUPE developed, grafted on to an intuition that was held by an actor."

4 "PE wasn't [always] able to take the results we had. There was learning to be done, but it's like they didn't quite know what to do with it. The organic connection didn't really happen until you [the article's author] came along."

problems of most academics who secure funding for carrying out participatory action research, but once the participatory process of knowledge production is over, there are very limited funds left for the research team to participate in implementing the changes. On the other hand, there is little room for us to engage with scientific literature on action research, which greatly contributes to the problem of the "single case" (Gustavsen, 2003) and ignorance of other methods. To remediate this, we have forged robust connections with research centers, actively participate in conferences and collaborate on projects, thereby facilitating a more organic exchange of ideas and learning with peers.

Our first systematization of the IUPE helped to identify four main functions of research in our model (adapted from Heck, 2017 : 36):



4.1. Produce and Mobilize Knowledge to Inspire and Facilitate action.

The first function of research in the model of Parole d'excluEs is to produce and mobilize knowledge that inspires and facilitates action, a role that is often found in participatory action research. In every neighborhood, where the PE community centers are located, an assessment of residents' needs and aspirations is conducted while implementing the action model, aiming to pinpoint priorities for action. Further studies may be undertaken to foster a collective understanding of issues and brainstorm effective strategies for addressing them (such as René, Heck and Ledoux, 2017; Heck and Lapalme, 2017). At times, researchers were mobilized to help to set the table on emerging topics or approaches community stakeholders wanted to work on. For instance, a literature review on participatory democracy was elaborated to support the development of such approaches with local institutions (Socquet-Juglard, 2016).

To give a better idea of how knowledge is produced with citizens to orient action, let us have a closer look at one example: when the research sector was newly created at PE, our first mandate was to undertake the Study on the Needs and Aspirations of Northeast Citizens of Montreal North (Heck, René & Castonguay, 2015), a district in which PE just opened a community center. It was the first study that was co-led by non-academic researchers and therefore allowed us to have a strong presence in the neighborhood and carry out an ethnographic study during a period of six months. A team of research assistants, fluent in languages spoken by major immigrant communities, invested spaces such as parks, barber shops, etc. to engage with residents in informal settings, to understand how they experience their neighborhood and what are their aspirations for change. Ethnographic methods were completed by

collective and individual semi-directed interviews, all of which were strongly adapted to habits and interests of the residents, taking up posture where residents strongly shaped the way research was carried out, as one of the staff members remembered:

"Je parle de [notre] posture. C'est vraiment dans leur actions propres à eux que les collectes se faisaient. Et je me souviens que même les focus group aussi ont pris vraiment la tangente de comment ils étaient à l'aise pour échanger. Par exemple, avec les jeunes du quartier, il fallait vraiment créer d'autres cadres, soit se rendre dans les lieux où ils se tiennent, au coin de la rue, dans les salons de coiffure. Et on a fait également la création artistique du rap avec eux au local."[5]

A multi-stakeholder committee composed of residents and practitioners with a thorough knowledge of the district helped us to design the research methods and followed us through the whole research process. They were involved in every aspect of the study, including data collection planning, data analysis, discussion around the research findings and dissemination. As we were then new to the neighborhood, the committee was essential to help us adapt the study, in methods and language, to the specific local context.

The research was an opportunity to hear and recognize the knowledge and experience of citizens living in poverty and social exclusion and also to engage them to act upon the issues identified. In order to gain access to this knowledge and experience, it was necessary to build trust, take part in community activities, encourage people to speak out, and listen to them. Creating moments of collective discussion about the challenges faced by the community helped some citizens to become aware of the collective nature of these issues. Understanding that, for example, the discrimination issue they are enduring is not related to them as individuals, but rather to a structural problem also experienced by other members of the community, was key in the process of conscientization.

As shared by one of the practitioners on the research committee, the methods employed in our study provided a platform to talk about topics that had rarely been directly addressed before :

"J'ai trouvé cela enthousiasmant de discuter de sujets chauds comme les préjugés et la discrimination parce qu'on n'en discute pas souvent" Compte-rendu du comité de recherche, 2 avril 2015.[6]

So far, the process, akin to numerous participatory action research projects, has catalyzed transformations through its very implementation. The amplification of people's voices through the research process has enhanced self-esteem, spurred mobilization, and lead to a perceptible shift of how issues are perceived. Notably, our study was the first to explicitly name prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity and territory as significant concerns, therefore fostering their recognition by local authorities.

However, what sets this model apart is the formal transition to action following the presentation of research findings. Indeed, at the citizens' assembly, where the results were presented, participants were encouraged to form a committee that would collectively work and act upon the challenges identified in the study. Remarkably, around thirty residents raised their hands to become members of this committee, later named RaCiNE ("Rassemblement des

5 "I like to mention [our] posture. It was really through [people's] own activities that the [data] collection was done. And I remember even the focus groups really taking the tangent of how they felt comfortable talking. For example, with the young adults in the neighborhood, we really had to create other settings, like going to the places where they chill, like street corners, barbershops. And we also did artistic rap composition with them in the community center."

6 "I found it thrilling to discuss hot topics like prejudice and discrimination because we don't often discuss them" Search Committee Minutes, April 2, 2015."

Citoyens du Nord-Est", litt.: Gathering of Northeast Citizens, also meaning Roots). RaCiNe became the collective actor from which actions were developed, supported by a practitioner from Parole d'excluEs. The challenges became the priorities to adress in the neighborhood. In essence, the study thus served as a starting point for intervention in the community, pinpointing pressing issues and encourage citizens to participate actively in improving their living conditions. Below, we will explore additional contributions made by researchers beyond the confines of the study.

4.2. Document, Analyze and Systematize Practice

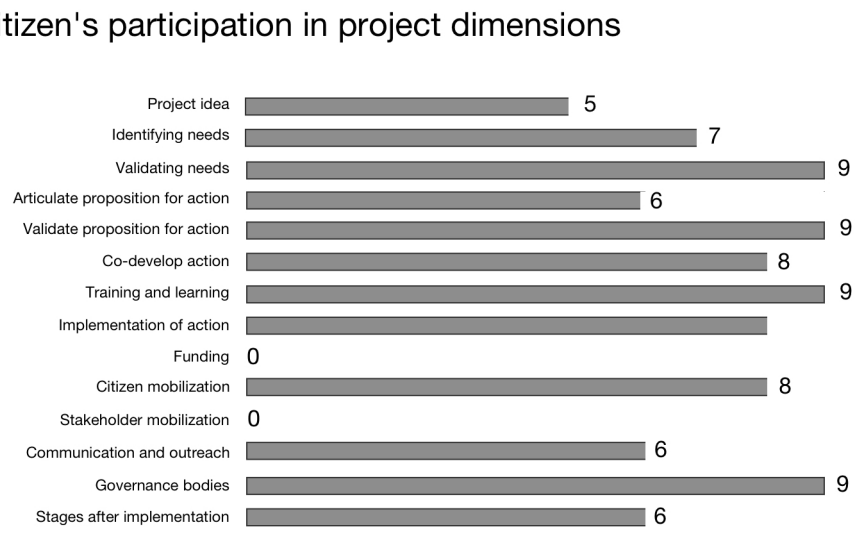
Parole d'excluEs positioned itself as an innovative model to fight poverty and exclusion by addressing their root causes and by co-developing action grounded in experiential, practical and academic knowledge. Consequently, a diverse array of methods and practices have been explored to address these complex issues. Research played a pivotal role in systematizing practice in order to improve and strengthen it, and eventually transfer what works to other organizations. In this regard, researchers evaluated and systematized mobilization practices, co-development strategies, and action research methods (Heck, 2017). Most of these reports remained unpublished and served for internal purposes of readjusting and strengthening methods, and documenting projects to preserve the collective memory, as one of the participants in the focus group confirmed: "Le fait que la recherche documente ça, ça facilite le fait que des pratiques, des postures, des façons de travailler puissent être transférées malgré le fait que certains individus [ne] sont plus présents."[7]

Getting a good overview of our own practice was also useful to better articulate it, be coherent with our values, and adjust our practice. For instance, as an organization promoting citizens' participation and empowerment, we analyzed the role of citizens and other stakeholders in projects that emerged from the action model. An analysis of 9 projects and 14 points in the co-development (ranging from identification of needs, participation in decision-making bodies, implementation of action to public communication on the project) revealed that citizens, for instance, were active in 12 out of 14 dimensions. The graphic below shows that citizens were involved in validating needs and propositions for action and they took part in learning processes and decision-making governance bodies in every single project (9/9) analyzed (Heck and Soquet-Juglard, 2019:10): [8]

This confirmed that citizen's participation is indeed in the center of the practice, while also shedding light on the fact that project ideas do not always originate from those most affected by the issues. Nonetheless, the importance and relevance of the issues addressed are consistently validated by them. Such insights have contributed to refining the practice, clarifying the dynamics of stakeholder involvement and better understanding levels of engagement required from professionals and citizens across various project types (see also Heck and Soquet, 2020).

7 "The fact that research documents it facilitates the transfer of practices, postures, and ways of working even though certain individuals are no longer present."

8 The discussion group in early 2024 to validate the findings presented in this article with actors still present in the project revealed that citizens are now also actively involved in partnership development, as their knowledge of potential collaborators has significantly increased over the years.

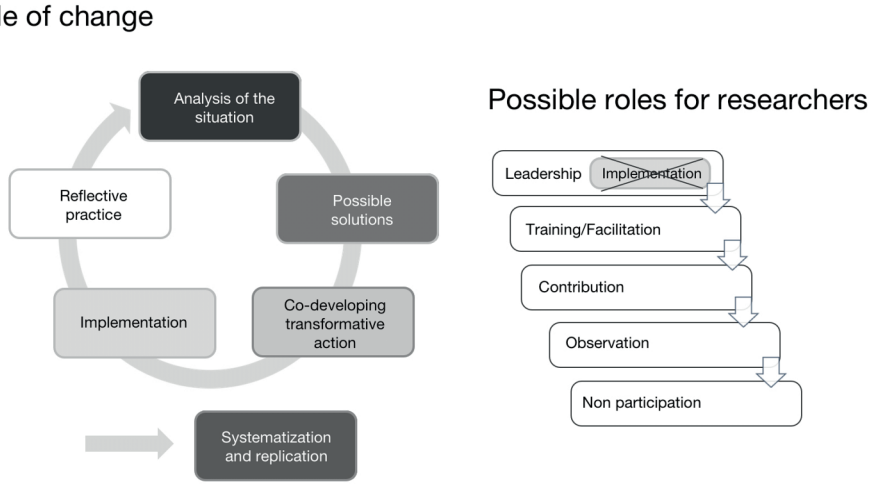


4.3. Codevelop Projects, Models and Practice

Parole d'excluEs' researchers are actively engaged not only in knowledge production and mobilization, but also in the co-development of projects, models and practice led by the organization and its partners. Throughout the years, a vast array of projects was developed, such as an alternative food system with a community garden, a cooperative, beehives and seasonal neighborhood markets (Heck and Socquet-Juglard, 2020), a community health space, an "Accorderie" through which people can exchange services on a time-based bank system, just to name a few. Depending on the resources and expertise already present in the field, the researchers assume varying roles in the cycle of change, without ever taking a leadership role in the implementation of change (see Figure below). This is how the limit is traced with practitioners in the very hybrid role of researchers in the PE model. They may take a leadership role in any other dimension (such as analyzing the situations or co-developing actions). On the other end, as there are many projects developing simultaneously, researchers might not be present at all in some of them.

Let us look at the development of the citizens' health space, to give a concrete example of the researchers' contribution to projects.

After identifying collectively that people in the North-Est sector of Montreal-North experienced various issues in accessing health services, the community voted in a public assembly for an additional and more inclusive health service in the neighborhood. Issues included insufficient service, economic and geographic access barriers to health services, communication and comprehension issues with health practitioners and the health system in general, challenges related to waiting times, and a lack of inclusion (Heck & Lapalme, 2017). According to the participants, and as debated in the assembly, a new health service should be set up, one that would be accessible, welcoming, inclusive, and open to community engagement. To further develop the initiative, we invited participants to create a citizens' health



committee that would look ahead at future action, alongside researchers, a union of health professionals, and representatives from Parole d'excluEs.

A co-construction process was then designed in a multi-stakeholder meeting that included representatives of the citizens health committee, Parole d'excluEs' researchers and practitioners, an academic, a few community organizations, and a representative of the Nurses' Union. Each stakeholder involved brought with them their own specific expertise: experiential (residents experiencing the challenges in the area); professional (health expertise, community organizers working in the area, and professionals with expertise in mobilization and co-construction); and academic (participatory approaches in medical practice and power balance in co-construction processes).

Parole d'excluEs led the implementation of the co-construction process. We, as Parole d'excluEs' researchers, were in charge of accompanying the citizens' committee and supporting them to expand their knowledge regarding health questions. We took up this role primarily because there were no specific resources tied to the project at that moment, such as a project manager, and our research funding modalities provided enough leeway to take up such roles. We were also safeguarding the power balance in the multi-stakeholders' meetings, and documenting the project. During this process, our role was little linked to research or knowledge production. We were facilitators in a co-development process, and used our reflexive skills to ensure as best as we could to have a good power balance, and paradoxically using our power as researchers for greater epistemic justice, as one of our colleagues described:

"Il y a une recherche de rééquilibrage des statuts en rééquilibrant la place que les savoirs ont dans le processus de co-construction. […] C'est un peu paradoxal parce que d'un côté on veut faire du rééquilibrage entre les statuts et les savoirs à l'intérieur de notre action. Mais d'un autre côté, le pouvoir et le statut du chercheur pèsent lourd dans les relations de partenariat qu'on peut tisser. […] Et c'est plus facile du coup de faire bouger les acteurs sur justement les aspects sur lesquels on veut les faire bouger, la participation citoyenne, la co-construction collective. […] Donc je pense que ça c'est un élément qui est à la fois un paradoxe, c'est à dire qu'on veut sortir de ça, mais en même temps on l'instrumentalise pour la bonne cause."[9]

9 "There is a quest to rebalance statuses by rebalancing the place that [different kinds of] knowledge have in the process of co-construction. […] It's a bit paradoxical because on the one hand we want to rebalance status and

On some occasions, we used light knowledge mobilization processes to make sure that everyone felt well equipped to participate in decision-making. For instance, one of the issues that came up during the study was communication. Some residents didn't understand the doctors' ways to explain things or did not feel heard when raising concerns or confident enough to ask questions. One of our academic co-researchers, a specialist of participative approaches in medical practice, presented examples from around the world, of how to value experiential knowledge in medical decisions and, more generally, foster patients' participation in the health system. This opened new horizons of what is possible and inspired residents to imagine new solutions and better understand the malleability of systems.

The process of co-construction illustrated how knowledge and action are imbricated. Citizens taking part in this health initiative were able to build a collective experiential expertise through the citizens health committee, to share it in a multi-stakeholder committee on an equal footing with others, to expand their knowledge, and take collective action.

The Citizen Health Space has developed, over the years, a few collaborations with health institutions, practitioners and researchers. The activities include listening groups and workshops on nutrition, on art therapy, or any other health-related subject that citizens have expressed an interest in. These workshops and self-help groups are led either by citizens who have a specific expertise (experiential or professional), or by health practitioners who are sensitive to issues of inclusion. The Citizen Health Space initiative has become leverage to share information related to local resources and to the community's needs; to develop a collective understanding and awareness on the gap between the citizens' health needs in Montreal-North and the area's services and resources; and to co-construct new actions to reduce this gap (Ruelland, 2020). It has been crucial to respond to emerging needs during the pandemic, during which the collaboration with the local health services has strongly increased (Autin, 2020), setting up workshops and vaccination clinics. It has, however, failed to implement clinical services, which are largely institutionalized and governmental in the context of Quebec. Over the last few years, the local health services decided to implement a service center in the neighborhood, which is certainly a step forward, even if its participatory dimension does not live up to the citizen's expectations.

4.4. Enhance Reflective Practice

The last function of research that we identified in the IUPE model is to enhance reflective practice. It means offering a space to take a step back, reflect about practice, projects, posture and then reinvest the learning. Reflective practice can be enhanced through studies, as the example of the roles of the different stakeholders has shown above, but it can also be done more organically, integrated into everyday practice such as in meetings. It is a function carried out in a cross-cutting way, both formally and informally (Hilden and Tikkamäki, 2013; Hase, 2014; Fuentes Caceres, 2019). One project where the reflective component was particularly strong was the North-Eastern Development Plan (Heck, Manon et al., 2020; Heck, 2020). The

> knowledge within our practice. But on the other hand, the power and status of the researcher weighs heavily in the partnerships we are able to forge. […] This makes it easier to get the actors to move on exactly those aspects that we want them to move on: citizen participation, co-construction. […] So I think that's an element that's paradoxical in the sense that we are trying to overcome [such dynamics], but at the same time we're using it for a good purpose."

goal of the project was to develop and implement a redevelopment plan for a highly dense and particularly disadvantaged area of the neighborhood, based on the perspectives of those who reside within it. It represented a departure from previous approaches and involved mobilizing municipal, community, and citizen stakeholders. With a keen interest in ensuring the success of the participatory dimension, researchers were integrated to document the project and provide feedback to adjust it along the way. One of our partners from the borough shares their experience with the following words:

"Dans le cadre des travaux entourant l'élaboration du Plan d'aménagement du secteur nord-est de l'arrondissement de Montréal-Nord, la présence de chercheures de l'IUPE au comité de coordination, a favorisé et soutenu la capacité des participantes à poser un regard réflexif tout au long de la démarche d'élaboration du plan. Leur connaissance du terrain, leur présence régulière aux séances de travail ainsi que leur expertise en recherche ont permis de documenter le processus de co-construction de la démarche. Ainsi, le comité de coordination a pu adapter son approche et ses stratégies de mobilisation à chaque étape du processus. Collaborer avec les chercheures de l'IUPE a contribué à soutenir le croisement des savoirs et à mobiliser les compétences déjà présentes au sein du comité et cela, au plus grand bénéfice de la population."[10]

Our approach to reflective practice was influenced by the project's aim to promote greater power-sharing among stakeholders and to recognize the value of experiential knowledge. A community partner involved offers her perspective on the researchers' contribution to the development plan:

"Dans le cadre du Plan d'aménagement du Nord-Est de Montréal-Nord, la recherche nous a produit un rapport d'évaluation (bilan) du processus de cette démarche collective. Ce bilan a mis en lumière les dynamiques/ rapports de force existants entre les différents partenaires institutionnels et communautaires. Ceci nous a permis de prendre du recul pour mieux définir nos rôles et responsabilités dans le respect des missions et expertises de chacun. Les chercheurs ont également été amenés à jouer un rôle de facilitateur pour une compréhension commune des concepts en ramenant les besoins exprimés par les citoyen·ne·s au cœur des démarches."[11]

This quote illustrates the added value of reflective practice and how research contributes to rebalancing power, as referred to in an earlier citation.

Each of the four functions of research presented above is tightly linked to and translates into action. The examples above further show how knowledge production or mobilization and action are intertwined. What are the underlying postures and configurations to be able to fulfill these functions? We have identified three core elements, based on our experience.

10 "While working on the development of the North-Eastern Development Plan of Montreal-North, the presence of IUPE researchers on the coordinating committee encouraged and supported participants' ability to take a reflective stance at the entire process of developing the plan. Their knowledge of the field, their regular attendance at working sessions and their research expertise helped to document the co-construction process. This enabled the coordinating committee to adapt its approach and mobilization strategies at each stage of the process. Collaborating with the IUPE researchers helped to support the merging of knowledge and mobilize the skills already present within the committee, to the greatest benefit of the population".

11 "As part of the North-Eastern Development Plan of Montreal-North, the researchers produced an assessment report on the process of this collective initiative. This assessment shed light on the power dynamics/balances between the institutional and community stakeholders. It has enabled us to take a step back and better define our roles and responsibilities, while respecting each other's missions and expertise. The researchers also played a role in facilitating a common understanding of the concepts and bringing the needs expressed by citizens back to the core of the process".

5. Core characteristics

5.1. Expanding the Role of Researchers to Co-develop Knowledge and Action

The first and probably most important core characteristic to bridge the gap between research and action in our experience is to expand our role beyond leading collaborative research processes. Defining research priorities by community actors (residents or practitioners actively engaged in transformative efforts in the neighborhood), co-developing methods with different stakeholders, and discussion of research results with the community through workshops or assemblies, proved most often not to be enough to translate findings into action.

This implies a willingness to step outside our comfort zones, as researchers, and actively immerse ourselves in the action we seek to understand. It emphasizes a two-way street of collaboration by not only inviting others to participate in research but also inviting researchers to partake in the action itself.

In this way, we can gain a profound insight into the intricate dynamics of action and the hurdles it presents. Understanding the dynamics of action helps researchers to better understand the capacity of the stakeholders to transform the situations they seek to change. In particular while elaborating paths for action and recommendations, without that knowledge, they can easily come up with disconnected and unrealistic propositions that cannot be implemented, and that can provoke frustration and a feeling of disempowerment. In our work, we found it very useful to rely on the notion of "pas proximal" by Yann LeBossé (2016), which is to take the biggest possible step in a given situation; this allows moving from a feeling of powerlessness to being in motion and taking action.

Finally, we argue that this also brings about greater reciprocity and a more balanced distribution of power. It means participating in a process where researchers have a support role, unlike their leadership role in the research process. As shown above, depending on the context and needs, researchers take on different roles (facilitator, contributor, lead, etc.), their roles can also evolve during a project, which requires a capacity to adapt and a sensitivity to changing contexts.

The involvement in action echoes, on the one hand, Dewey's pragmatic approach (Cormier, 2012) on learning through action as a dynamic process where individuals engage in active experiences and reflection to construct their understanding of the world. On the other, it also builds on South American traditions of engaged research and decolonial approaches, where frontiers between action and research are often blurred and the role of practitioners and those with first-hand knowledge of social exclusion is paramount (Fals Borda, 1973, 1996; Freire, 2005; Costamagna and Spinelli, 2021).

Participation in the co-development and implementation of action also requires good knowledge, strong relationship and trust with the community or partner organization. This leads us to the second core characteristic.

5.2. Long-Time Presence and Anchorage in the Community

The second core characteristic, long-term presence in the community, is further enhanced when the researcher is based within the community rather than solely at the university. This proximity facilitates meeting numerous criteria for successful participatory action research.

Through long-term presence within the community, engaging in active listening and dialogue with its members, researchers can access a diverse range of voices, allowing pressing research topics to organically emerge. Moreover, this presence fosters the development of close relationships, trust, and a comprehensive understanding of the context, thereby facilitating the design of the knowledge production process. Being embedded in the community also enables researchers to continuously adapt and refine methods and objectives in response to the rapidly evolving environment and changing priorities, ensuring that research remains relevant and action-oriented. Decentralizing research from the university necessitates a shift in perspective and posture, recognizing that knowledge production can occur within the community and not exclusively within academia, with a focus on contributing primarily to social change. This often results in agile and pragmatic research approaches, conducive to quick and effective knowledge mobilization.

Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that direct involvement in the field and robust community engagement in the knowledge production process serve as potent mechanisms for fostering ownership of results, thereby facilitating their translation into action. Additionally, the presence of researchers beyond the confines of the study process itself offers the distinct advantage of bolstering knowledge mobilization and transfer. This extends beyond the creation of tailored communication tools for stakeholders to encompass the informal dissemination of findings during project development and implementation.

5.3. Partnering with Universities

The third core characteristic is the connection to university. Firstly, dialogue with university researchers, whether through involvement in research centers, bodies, projects or other forums, enables one to step out of our one's particular context, and understand the issues at stake in a broader societal context. It is also about nourishing reflections, building bridges and broadening perspective, and benefitting from a fresher, more distant and critical viewpoint on one's own work. Furthermore, it helps to nourish perspectives on theories, frameworks or experiences from other contexts, as we have seen in the Citizen Health Space.[12] Furthermore, collaborating with universities also means benefiting from additional resources through collaboration with academics and students, as well as access to infrastructure and facilities.

Secondly, fostering robust connections and partnership with universities is also indispensable for advancing the wider recognition of action research and expanding its practice. One crucial avenue lies in students' involvement, be it through internships, thesis supervision, research contracts and or teaching AR, recognizing that they represent the future of the field. Engaging with universities (projects, research centers, governance bodies) also helps to advocate more largely for a stronger AR practice, informed by diverse knowledge produced outside the academia. It can contribute to influence and shape practices; it is a place for advocacy to highlight and value the social impact of research and more generally knowledge production outside universities. Transforming universities cannot be achieved without at least a partial engagement from within the institution.

12 The theoretical dimension is one that has been particularly developed in the 3rd phase of the IUPE, after we have left the project, by making Nancy Fraser's theory on social justice accessible for practitioners (Gignac et al., 2024) and by producing a tool to assess and promote epistemic justice (Manon & Autin, 2023).

6. Decentralizing Action Research

In this article we have identified four main functions and three core characteristics of an action research model that is closely tied to tangible transformations beyond studies. While all the elements above stem from our experience at the Parole d'excluEs University Incubator, we believe the core characteristics also echo other experiences, as we find them separately in other experiences. The three core characteristics reflect and underscore an epistemological position where researchers are not only engaged in communities, coproducing knowledge outside the realm of universities, but also contribute to developing action. This implies decentralizing knowledge production in three ways: first, in terms of the locus of knowledge production by extending it outside universities, second, in terms of those who are credible knowledge bearers, by valuing experiential and practical knowledge as well as academic, and third, in the role of researchers who are invited to engage, beyond knowledge production, in the co-development of actions. Promoting such models asks, as referred to above, for a transformation of universities und funding agencies underscoring community engagement in much stronger ways. This decentralization recalls elements of early PAR in the South (Hall and Tandon, 2017), when action research was rooted in social movements, however, lacking the wider connections and institutional recognition that we are calling for.

For an experience such as the IUPE, despite strong international connections and its robust ties to university, the engagement within the community has the downside of being a very "inward" centered practice. It has contributed to tangible transformations at the local level, lacking however the scale to allow for a deeper transformation of living conditions that need interventions at the provincial or national level. It is only through resources invested in networking and advocacy that a wider recognition and scaling of such practices can be attained. Joining the calls of many other colleagues in the field (Bradbury et al, 2019; Larrea, 2020; Fricke et al., 2022), larger and systemic change as well as stronger network connecting diverse actors doing action research is paramount to address the complex and urgent problems our world faces.

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Chasing balloons as scientific practice: On transformative co-creation and epistemic ethics of care in the emerging field of youth citizen social science

Aina Landsverk Hagen, Sara Berge Lorenzen

Abstract: How does including youth in research within a citizen social science framework challenge and transform our participatory action research practices and approaches? Through a storying journey we unravel how the training and subsequent conducting of a co-creative research process with young citizen social scientists are evolving from a cacophony of traditions, approaches and disciplines, among them youth participatory action research, action research in organizations, citizen science and social anthropology. The article is based on empirical research with a group of young people in Oslo, Norway, involved in a large collaborative citizen social science project on social inclusion of youth in Europe. We have witnessed closely how an *epistemic ethics of care* is integral to securing the *epistemic justice* of youth and argue that citizen social science can promote both epistemic justice and *epistemic abundance* by including youth in all parts of a rigorous research process that produces new scientific knowledge. Yet, we found that performing an ethics of care is (close to) impossible within the current conditions and structures of social sciences, as our ideals and views on what science is, delimit the practices of relational care necessary for inclusive processes. The implications of our findings call for an ethics of care framework for both citizen social science and action research practices.

Key words: Youth, ethics of care, citizen social science, action research, co-creation

La persecución de globos como práctica científica: Sobre la co-creación transformadora y la ética relacional del cuidado en el emergente campo de las ciencias sociales ciudadanas desarrolladas por personas jóvenes

Resumen: ¿Cómo desafía y transforma nuestras prácticas y enfoques de investigación de acción participativa la inclusión de jóvenes en la investigación dentro de un marco de ciencia social ciudadana? A través de un viaje narrativo desentrañamos cómo la formación y posterior realización de un proceso de investigación co-creativa basada en la ciencia social ciudadana con jóvenes están evolucionando en el marco de una cacofonía de tradiciones, enfoques y disciplinas. Entre ellas destacan la investigación-acción participativa juvenil, la investigación-acción en organizaciones, la ciencia ciudadana y la antropología social. El artículo se basa en una investigación empírica con un grupo de jóvenes de Oslo, Noruega, involucrados en un gran proyecto colaborativo de ciencias sociales ciudadanas sobre la inclusión social de los jóvenes en Europa. Hemos sido testigos de cómo una ética epistémica del cuidado es un elemento integral de la justicia epistémica de la juventud y argumentamos que las ciencias sociales ciudadanas pueden promover tanto la justicia epistémica como la abundancia epistémica al incluir a la juventud en todas las fases de un proceso de investigación riguroso que produce nuevo conocimiento científico. Sin embargo, descubrimos que llevar a cabo una ética

del cuidado es (casi) imposible dentro de las condiciones y estructuras actuales de las ciencias sociales, ya que nuestros ideales y puntos de vista sobre lo que es la ciencia delimitan las prácticas de cuidado relacional necesarias para procesos inclusivos. Las implicaciones de nuestros hallazgos exigen un marco de ética del cuidado tanto para las ciencias sociales ciudadanas como para las prácticas de investigación-acción.

Palabras clave: Juventud, ética del cuidado, ciencias sociales ciudadanas, investigación-acción, co-creación

Prologue

Frederick (research assistant): How does it feel today?

> Maryam (Youth Citizen Social Scientist, YCSS): It was a lot of fun, actually. I'm a little impressed too. That we have come this far. At the start I was like, shit, I am not able to come up with any ideas. And look where we are now. So, I like it, it's fun. I am very lucky to have been a part of it.
>
> Frederick: And we are lucky to have you with us.

1. Walking an article: An invitation to a storying journey

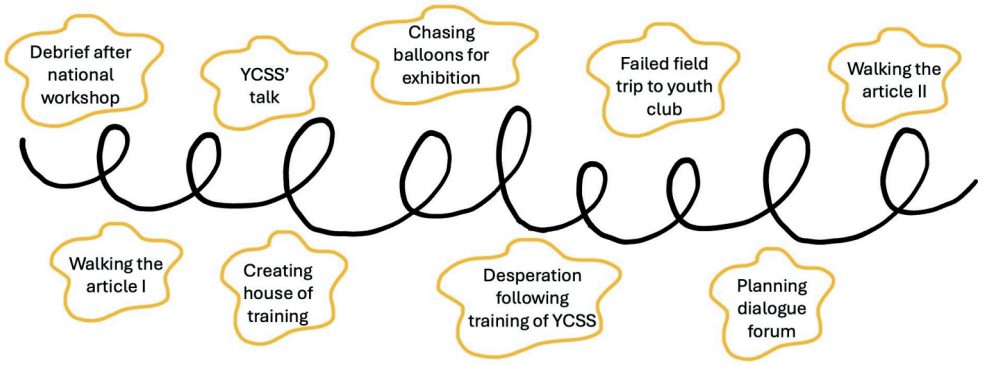
How should we write this article, I, Aina, ask my colleague Sara. She looks at me with indetermination written in her face and hesitates before answering. "Maybe use the IMRaD model?" The what model?, I reply. "The IMRaD model, the way they taught us in the interdisciplinary writing course at the university. Introduction, Method…, what was the R?", Sara ponders. We look at each other, skeptically. No, that's not something we were taught as students in social anthropology. The discipline that hails the empirical narratives before all else and that treats theory as the necessary, but invisible soft nails weaving meaning from the stories people "tell" us by living their daily lives. Let's do it our way, meaning we will experiment with form and process simultaneously[1], by developing our thoughts alongside our writing, thus exposing our "bumpy road" experiences of facilitating for a co-creative citizen social science process with youth belonging to an inner city district in Oslo; Norway, in rhythmic interference with (urban) nature and our material surroundings. We will practice narrative inquiry as an ethical commitment towards making meanings move[2], with the intent of finding the story in the experience[3] and making mindfully sense of the processes together[4]. We therefore invite you, the reader, as a co-participant of this research story, in "thinking with, not about"[5] what science and scientists are "becoming with"[6] when engaging with non-academic interlocutors as partners – and sometimes leaders (we will get back to this provoking

1 Tolstad et al. 2017, Hagen & Osuldsen 2021.
2 Bochner & Herrmann 2020.
3 Stone 1997.
4 Weick et al. 1999, Bradbury et al. 2019.
5 Bochner & Herrmann 2020:298.
6 Haraway 2008.

notion) of a research process inspired by participatory action research yet conducted within a citizen social science framework.[7]

Something was troubling us, when faced with the task of writing it all up. But what? To find out, the next day, I, Aina, put on walking shoes, pack my favorite swim suit and water bottle in a small bag, I walk towards the beach, the Oslo fjord, the water, I walk and swim in cold, salt water, I let the sun dry me up, before I walk further, walk through the woods, the forest, the beaches and the people sunbathing, roaming, walking their dogs. I walk this article. I think and walk and think and stop at old, wooden benches to write down key words or even some sentences, my thoughts, ideas, I walk further, up a hill, behind a newly painted house, down a hill, across a sandy beach. The article walks with me, brain wise. Or I walk with it, as it surfaces, slowly first, then in jumps and intensely when I reach the end of the convoluted path, in line with my thoughts on how our planet is literally and metaphorically burning while we, its inhabitants, seemingly go on as if everything was normal. How can science practices and science learning *not* be transformative in such conflicting times?[8] The intellectual dissonance resonates with the hybrid sensation of thinking-walking ideas in a hilly terrain in the face of a journal deadline. To make it easier for you to follow our wayfaring, we provide you with a visual of our storying process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The storyline of this article, with narrative milestones as guidance for the journey.

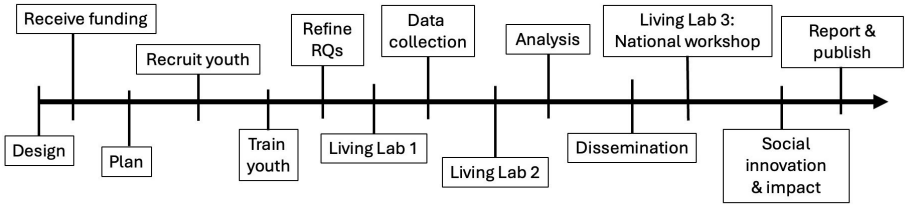


Hold on to the feeling of dissonance. Let's revisit the dialogue quoted in the prologue, where research assistant Frederick engages Maryam, one of the young citizen social scientists, in this dedicated space for critical and emotional reflexivity we called "debriefs".[9] It took place in a meeting room at the local museum where we had just held the final Living Lab of our citizen social science project *YouCount: Empowering youth and cocreating social innovations and policy-making through youth citizen social science*, engaging local, regional, and national stakeholders in creative interaction with the findings from almost two years of co-research in a district municipality in Oslo. The goal of the event, that we called a "national workshop" in our design of the YouCount project, was to come up with ideas for social innovations that could lead to social inclusion of youth in Norway, through introducing quality youth jobs in

7 Canto-Farachala & Norvoll 2023.
8 López-López et al. 2021.
9 Bradbury et al. 2019, Cunliffe et al. 2020, Aabye et al. 2020.

local neighborhoods. Now we had gathered, this diverse group of youth, social scientists, and students, in a debrief, to make collectively sense of it all. This event was the last engagement planned in a series of training sessions, data collection initiatives, dialogue forums and living labs with young and adult stakeholders, analysis, dissemination, and ideation workshops involving a group of 12 young citizens that were hired to be part of our research team in the YouCount project (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: A timeline of the YouCount project from design and planning to finalizing the project (2017 – 2024), as perceived by the Norwegian team.



The youth all had minority backgrounds, reflecting the demographics in the district, and were between 14 and 21 years when we recruited them in the winter of 2022. Maryam was pinpointing what emerged as a shared experience, that we all had come a long way from the outset – and that we felt lucky (and quite exhausted) to have been of part of this process. We finally felt like a team. It took 18 months. This is where the dissonance surfaces.

> Frederick (research assistant): I'm absolutely impressed with all of us, and I'm a little heartbroken that I'm going to quit and start a new job, but…
>
> Aina (researcher): You will become a stakeholder!
>
> Frederick: I will become a stakeholder. (laughter) Yes, I think so. It must be yes.

The process of writing up our reflections and realizations in hindsight became a surprisingly lonely and painful affair, going from our participatory ideal of "all in" to an "all alone" mode of thinking-working. These debrief snippets of which you will encounter again, became companions in our attempts to move the chaotic experiences of co-researching into meaning, through an explorative, narrative inquiry of this recently completed citizen social science endeavor. Our colleagues were already on new projects or engaged in new jobs, our young co-researchers were radio-silent on the messenger channel, we guessed enmeshed in social and educational commitments elsewhere. We took hold of the imprints of their former presence, namely transcripts from these debriefs done after co-created sessions with local stakeholders, and in desperation engaged in embodied, rather than collective, sensemaking through walking the familiar, physical surroundings of our nature-city. After all, encountering stories experi-

entially, privileging the standpoint of the storyteller(s), is an ethical and relational question, a means of being with others, of thinking with their stories in order to witness, understand, and care for them.[10]

This is why walking the article needs to be included in this research storying of which you, the reader, are a co-participant. Making sense of a process of transformation one is also initiator of, is a messy, non-linear process, entangled in the invisible labor, relational and emotional work of inclusion.[11] Our experience of dissonance led to a growing realization, which is also this articles' main message: We need a relational ethics of care integrated in the design of our science processes. Another realization quickly follows the first: Performing an ethics of care is (close to) impossible within the current conditions and structures of social sciences, particularly if you simultaneously engage in undoing *epistemic injustice*[12].

2. Epistemic injustice, epistemic deficiency, and ethics of care

Half of the world's population is now 30 years or younger. The proportion of young people is expected to reach 57 per cent by the end of 2030 and this is the largest generation of young people in history.[13] Still, young people are, we claim, as a collective exposed to epistemic injustice, "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower"[14]. Amina, one of the young citizen social scientists in our team, a young girl in her early twenties, held a talk at an international conference during the YouCount project's first year:

"I feel like I am in this huge group of people that are being studied constantly, always talked about and the media pulling out all these statistics. But nobody has really asked me what I think of it. I mean I am Muslim, I live in Tøyen, I used to live in Grønland, I'm black, and my parents are immigrants, but anybody who reads media and anybody who reads any source of science paper might think that they have an idea of who I am. (…) that's why we need projects like YouCount so we can get information directly from the source."

Looking back at her message from that day we see that she was addressing the ongoing epistemic injustice done by social scientists towards young people living in these areas of Oslo, and by also addressing faith, skin color, territorial and citizen status she adds layers to the age discrimination dominant in Western society. In the municipal sub districts Tøyen and Grønland, most of the youth have multicultural, minority background, with parents from the Global South – the young citizen social scientists were mainly children of immigrants from Northern African countries. These youth face epistemic injustice not just because they are subject to unfair judgement due to prejudice, social injustice, and discrimination, but also because they are not included as stakeholders of the knowledge produced on their own group or invited as epistemic partners in providing that knowledge.[15] The adult population's tendency to take children and youth perspectives and experiences for granted, is giving them a secondary status in science[16], amplified by their upbringing in the divided city of Oslo.[17]

10 Bochner & Herrmann 2020:295–296.
11 Ahmed 2012.
12 Byskov 2020.
13 UN Climate Change News, 12 August 2023.
14 Fricker 2007:1 in Gélineau et al. 2024.
15 Byskov 2020.
16 Alderson & Morrow 2011, Gravesen et al. 2019.
17 Brattbakk 2023.

Including youth in the knowledge generating processes would therefore be a necessary, first step for undoing this wrong. But what are the tools available to us?

Alternative science traditions like action research and citizen science are motivated largely by an *epistemic deficiency*, as there is a lack of certain kinds of data and knowledge that these approaches strive to obtain through close engagement with stakeholders and citizens respectively. These approaches thus highlight a need for institutional change within science, and call for an extended epistemology of knowing as part of a participatory paradigm.[18]

Participatory Action Research and Citizen *Social* Science are both offsets from these alternative traditions of opening science to society (and society to science). These approaches are rather motivated by correcting epistemic injustice and thus highlight a need for social change. Including youth in such endeavors is a challenge that some in the Participatory Action Research community have already taken on, under the heading Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)[19], where youth "contribute to the problem definition and carry out data collection tasks", yet rarely being involved in the analysis of the results[20].

If one views Action Research as an orientation towards *inquiry* for gaining knowledge on an identified need for action, with the aim of institutional change[21], PAR projects center on a community focus with research questions emerging from a collective endeavor to find the needs for action, aiming for social change[22]. In YPAR, when working with youth, the emphasis on building youth science literacy is even stronger, through continuous training and non-scientific relationship building, often using arts-based methods as a way of engaging and connecting with the youth's emotions and subjectivities.[23]

Being action researchers centers our scientific endeavors on doing 'with' rather than doing 'for' when conducting research[24], and this resonates with the newly emerging approach of citizen *social* science.[25] Questions that action researchers pose to themselves on a regular basis, is also now reflected upon by more conventional social scientists, as they invite citizens into their research process as full-fledged participants: Who gets to produce knowledge? Who gets to question standard scientific approaches? Who gets to invent new methodologies? Who gets to design research processes? Or, in the spirit of this article's exploratory format, a question that will make sense as you, the reader, make meaning as you move on reading; Can chasing balloons all over the city be called research?

In earlier YPAR projects we have witnessed closely how an *epistemic ethics of care* is integral to securing epistemic justice. In contrast to the action research we are familiar with, both YPAR and citizen social science aim to include the participating youth in *becoming like researchers*, through training, for them to acquire science literacy as part of the co-research process.[26] With co-creative youth citizen social science (YCSS) we also promote *epistemic abundance* by including youth in all parts of a rigorous research process that produces new scientific knowledge. The need for providing training, support for data collection, analysis, dissemination, and social impact – in caring ways, is even more acute. This approach is most

18 Heron and Reason 1997 in Cunliffe et al. 2020.
19 Cahill 2007, Cammarota & Fine 2008, Kennan & Dolan 2017, Pech et al. 2019, Goessling et al. 2019.
20 Chiaravalloti et al (2022, p.2).
21 Reason and Bradbury 2006.
22 Schwantz 2008.
23 Jacquez et al. 2013, Leavy 2015, Johnson 2017, Capous-Desyllas & Morgaine 2018, Lewin & Shaw 2022.
24 Greenwood & Levin 2007:1.
25 Albert et al. 2021.
26 Solé et al. 2023.

certainly complexifying things instead of reducing reality's complexity.[27] Still, there is a lack of examples and experience sharing on how to do this science involvement of youth in practice.[28] So, let's share.

3. Complexifying research processes: Creating the house of training

"What if we use a house as a metaphor to visualize the training process?". I, Sara, find myself standing before a poster covered in colorful post-its, surrounded by my colleagues in a meeting room by the fjord, south of Oslo. Our task is to create a framework for training youth to become citizen social scientists, a framework for all ten case studies in nine European countries partnering in this Horizon 2020 funded research project. We have close to two full days to achieve what seems rather impossible. We decided to go to a remote location, away from the buzz of the capital and the rigor of the scientific institutions we are trying to dismantle through this YCSS co-creation process. In the same way we try to escape the above-mentioned "IMRaD" format, we aim to transcend established scientific practices. The "IMRaD" format refers to a paper structured by four main sections; Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion, and is a structure originating from planned, systematic research in laboratories. The rigor in such traditional scientific formats, methods, and approaches postulate that the researcher should strive to be "dis-attached" from the messiness of the everyday life of the people they are studying and "clean up" the complexities their observations are exposing. We need the exact opposite. We urgently need to complexify.

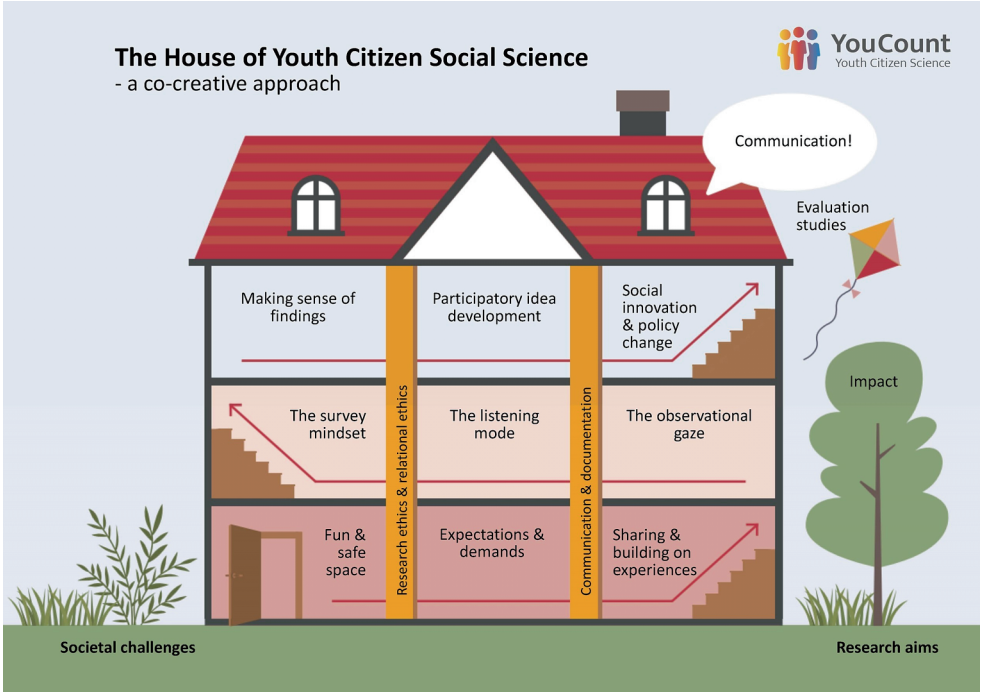
It feels desperate, reckless, for us to create this thing, these training strategies, from scratch. We have promised EU/the partners/our coordinator Reidun a "framework" but don't really know what that means. Who are we to do this? Imposter syndrome is looming. Like most action researchers, we have never learned how to do action research as part of our higher education, we instead mimic senior colleagues doing it.[29] We have no script for or literature "on how to educate action researchers (…) there is no systematic presentation on how to impart those skills in academic settings".[30] We do the only thing possible; we start off by writing down all our ideas and thoughts on what a framework for training should entail, drawing up on our diverse experiences.[31] In previous projects, our research primarily focused on youth participation in urban planning. We have also conducted several socio-cultural site analysis, inspired by human geography,[32] where we have combined anthropological methods with methods for increased participation of public and private sector employees and collective creativity among adult professionals.[33] We have trained youths in fieldwork methodology, and they have done mini fieldwork exercises such as participant observation and interviews in their own neighbourhoods before using this data to create new ideas for developing their immediate surroundings.[34] We have designed drawing techniques that were later used in

27 Tsoukas 2016.
28 Shamrova & Cummings 2017, Trondsen & Eriksen 2019.
29 Reason & Bradbury 2006, Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998.
30 Greenwood and Levin 2007: 239.
31 Tolstad et al. 2017, Hagen & Lyng 2019, Hagen & Andersen 2021.
32 Brattbakk et al. 2015, 2017.
33 Carlsen et al. 2012a, 2012b.
34 Hagen & Andersen 2021.

narrative embroidery and narrative photography.[35] We have experienced first-hand how the emotional and subjective needs to be at the core of the relationships we build with the involved youth.[36]

By invoking the collective memories of all these past projects, we quickly discover that we have so much more stuff in our disciplinary baggage than we first imagined, to help us in building a citizen *social* science project that is *not* a complementary reaction to citizen science projects within natural sciences.[37] In most citizen *social* science projects, it is not about hypothesis testing or hobby-based engagement around the issues of migrating birds or endangered frogs, where citizens are consulting systematically.[38] It is rather research on social issues of concern to local communities, where citizens are engaging in science and society collaborations on both knowledge generation *and* efforts for social change.[39]

Figure 3: The initial model we called the House of Training was later developed into the House of Youth Citizen Social Science, encompassing all phases of a CSS project (Borgström et al. 2024). What is not included in this model is the pre-phase of designing and acquiring funding for a CSS project.



35 Vestby 2015, 2020.
36 Hagen & Osuldsen 2021.
37 Burawoy 2005, Housley et al. 2014, Albert et al. 2021.
38 Purdam 2014, Bonney et al. 2014.
39 Canto-Farachala & Norvoll 2023.

The model of the house (see Figure 3) is structured across three floors, each housing three rooms, along with an attic and an outdoor area. On the ground floor, you'll find "Fun & safe space", "Expectations and demands" and "Our own experiences". These rooms constitute the foundational structure of the house – essential elements that we see as important to be established *before* we start to train the youths in social science research methods. The emphasis on tensions and everyday emotions as integral parts of the action research process[40], is thus guiding the design of our framework, a scaffolding for linking experience with sense-making and connecting reflection to action.[41] Drawing on our experiences facilitating various co-creation processes involving youth, we see this as a fundamental element for establishing a productive and creative atmosphere where everyone feels encouraged to openly contribute their ideas and thoughts, with the aim of achieving epistemic abundance.

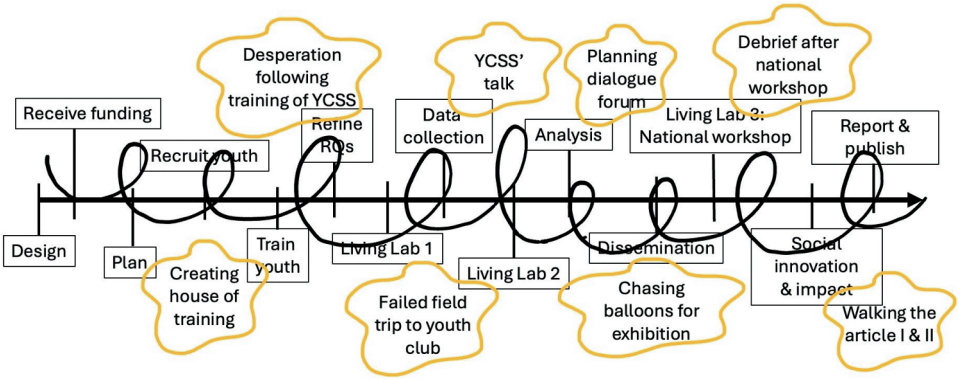
Additionally, all youth we have worked with possess a lot of experiences from school and in their life that are relevant to the research they are about to undertake. "Our own experiences" is thus part of the ground floor to recognize the importance of allocating time for the youth to share, document and prepare to build on these experiences before starting the methods training phase. This is also done to give the youth "license to think"[42], emphasizing the epistemic contributions they make even *before* we start collecting data and they transition into full-fledged citizen social scientists, to equip them with the skills to turn on "the survey mindset", "the listening mode" and "the observational gaze" of data collection.

We debated, when designing the House of Training, where ethics should be placed in such a generative metaphor. It surfaced as a matter of importance. Rather than making research ethics and communication into fdesignated "rooms", we chose to make them the load-bearing beams of the house, showing that they are the foundational pillars of the entire process. Essentially, this entails incorporating practical tasks related to ethics and documentation into every aspect of the training and subsequent data collection. It also reflects our position from social anthropology where the question of who is in control at any moment of fieldwork should be replaced with a question of who or what takes responsibility for setting things, ideas, and people in motion. The ethical is present in all situations, all the time, as something immanent in us humans.[43]

It is precisely the episodic nature of the phenomenon that gives us the opportunity to be ethical in the field without following a predetermined moral code. This goes also for engagement with young participants as citizen social scientists. We are engaging in situational and relational ethics, both as collaborators and as researchers. This double bind makes an ethics of care necessary to include as a relational practice of "doing good" towards all involved in research, rather than a research ethics of "do no harm" that is applied only in situations of data collection. This approach to ethics influences our storytelling process and necessitates this alternative, rather chaotically combined project and storying timeline (see Figure 4).

40 Aaby et al. 2021, Cunliffe et al. 2020, Gearty and Marshall 2020.
41 Bradbury et al. 2019:6.
42 Westrum 1993:404.
43 Lempert in Laidlaw 2014.

Figure 4: The storying timeline fused with the research design timeline of the YouCount Norway project. The narrative milestones are emphasized in yellow blobs.



To better make sense of our experience-based realization, we need to dive into one of the main learnings from the YouCount project, on how the form and output of research results should be as engaging and creative as the content and process – and what toll that takes for the researcher.

4. Desperation, part I: The messiness of it all, or on chasing balloons

Two weeks before the debrief after the national workshop I, Aina, jump on my bike, a sunny Monday in the city center of Oslo, people walking, cars and buses turning corners, I juggle through the streets with electric speed. The feeling I have in my gut is far from fantastic. Running up the moving stairs of a local hardware store, again. This time chasing for strips of led lights to decorate the ceiling of the first "prison cell" at the Intercultural Museum (IKM), on popular demand by the co-researching youth. Their ideas turned into sweat and purchases, we are creating this vision together – I think. We started with a set of shoe boxes, to translate our findings into visual and tangible elements that would preferably excite both ourselves and the potential audience, the visitors of our social science exhibition at this former police station turned museum.

The familiar sensation of desperation is creeping into my physical self. We are building an exhibition in this local museum as a "dialogue forum", another deliverable in the YouCount project. The goal of the exhibition is to convey the results from the numerous interviews, surveys, mappings, and observations we have done together with the YCSS. Will the other partners in YouCount acknowledge our efforts? Will Patricia, the Work Package leader in charge of participatory communication efforts, nod with appreciation when we meet her at the next consortium meeting? Will they see through our attempts at "delivering" on a task that we quite frankly don't really understand? I inhale fresh exhaust from the roaming cars and feel the sweat trickle. One more stop, we need balloons. More balloons, blue to inspire imaginaries of an endless open sky of possibilities when the results from the co-research on youth's access to

employment are put into national policy. The balloons we put up yesterday are already shrinking, and in a few hours the team will welcome invited guests to the exhibition opening.

Desperation, chaos, and serendipity are potent ingredients in this transdisciplinary mix of action research-as-(precarious) labour, and precisely the ingredients of research that we continue to hide and smooth over – both when we write about our results and the process to get there. So how did it go? Let's jump back to the debrief following the national workshop, two weeks after the exhibition opening.

> Dichino (YCSS): I think today was actually a pretty good day for YouCount. I think it was a very good representation of what your work is. Or what you build with your work.
>
> Frederick (research assistant): Ours, D. (laughter)
>
> Dichino: Ours, yes. Because at the very beginning when I was going to take it (the assignment), it was very unclear, I felt. Both for myself and a bit around actually, when I asked the young (YCSS) what they were doing. Now I feel it is a little clearer what is the meaningfulness of it, or what is the social effect of what we do. That we conduct research and set up exhibitions and initiate such conversations.
>
> (From debrief with YCSS after national workshop May 24, 2023)

Dichino is one of the youths who we involved later in the process, to assist us in disseminating the results from the data collection in the Oslo case to a Norwegian speaking audience. He is part of a group of young locals working in the media group called Ildfluene (Fireflies), organized by a neighborhood incubator for social entrepreneurship, Tøyen Unlimited. Dichino and his 19-year-old college San San have joined our biweekly meetings for a few months now, since the first dialogue forum we facilitated just before Christmas last year. They have contributed with new energy and bothersome questions and queries we don't know how to answer. "What is the purpose of the exhibition that you are planning?" Who is the target group?" "How do you plan to spread the word about the project to other youth?" They pushed our collective sensemaking process further by turning the table and exposing a narrative inquiry on us, the co-research team. What stories do we want to tell the world and how do we make sense of the storying process as a collective?

> Sara (researcher): I thought especially when I was standing there watching everyone work on ideas, when Dichino and I had Crazy 8, and when you went over to discuss, just the thought of how important this is, that there are so many people sitting here, with so many different perspectives, many with quite a lot of power, and we have us, and there we sit and discuss and come up with so much good. Then I got a chilling sensation. It was really, really cool. And just think, as has been said here, that we have been at it for a year and a half, we have gotten to know each other so well, we work so well together, and achieved so much.
>
> (From debrief with YCSS after national workshop May 24, 2023)

Dichino has not just transitioned from being an outside observer and documenter, to an engaged co-producer of scientific findings, he is also positioning himself as an action researcher performing transformative inquiry on us. He is both genuinely annoying and extremely helpful in his direct and very justified questions. And he is pointing at something crucial in his comment from the debrief quoted above: The professional lives of action researchers are conversations, conversations, conversations.

Sometimes we wonder if the research process owns us, more than we control it as a creation of our own. Why did we write in the proposal to the SwafS program[44] that we would engage 10 core youth citizen scientists? Why not 5 or even 2 youth? That would have been so

44 SwafS is the acronym for Science with and for Society, see https://www.sfi.ie/funding/international/european-research-area/horizon-2020/swafs/

much easier to handle, reducing the level of hourly contracts, personal messages to encourage commitment, follow-up conversations to secure safe space and continuous trust-building. Is that responsible research innovation, to take care of so many young people?

We blame serendipity and random suggestions, "think of a number", in the imaginary phase of a collaborative research process (before funding) in that rented meeting room in Brussels six years ago, when we co-wrote the application. Now, in the very non-ephemeral, down-to-earth deliver or die phase, we are stunned by our own ability to repeatedly aim for the sky and beyond *before* the money is on the table. What budget post includes the ethics of care, the sweat of relational labor?

The transition from citizen natural science to citizen social science without the complementary institutional support seems to raise only a few eyebrows, some nods but exceptionally little revolt. We became fired up. We decided early on that on principle, we couldn't accept the EU prerogative of defining citizen scientists as volunteers. Our colleague Arne's mantra "leading through cake" transitioned into "co-creating through food". We bought the youth ice cream, snacks, take away food from the local diner, pizza, soda, juices, nuts, chocolate, fruits, crackers. We fed them into oblivion, until we found a loophole in the regulations and could begin to pay them hourly salaries as planned and communicated to them from the beginning of our recruitment process.

Other studies have found that the voluntary work done by nonprofessional researchers in CSS activities, is only seldom compensated financially, and conclude that "these observations indicate how CSS is blurring, if not shifting, boundaries between paid and unpaid as well as voluntary and non-voluntary work for research" and thus deserve further study.[45] The implication wasn't clear to us before we were actively prohibited from renumerating the youth involved in YouCount. What young person has it as his/her hobby to investigate social inclusion processes in their neighborhood, on their free time, following a full day at school?

5. Desperation, part II: Involving even more people, roles, and tasks

Sara (researcher): I am so proud and happy, and full of energy. (laughter) Damn, it's been so much fun today, and it's what is repeatedly said, as many have talked about now, but my God, what a team we are. That is exactly what we are. We are a team that gets so much done together, and just look at it today, as Aina said, everything just flows, everyone does their job, takes responsibility, we just get it done. It was really, really fun to watch.

(From debrief with YCSS after national workshop May 24, 2023)

Fast rewind from this debrief moment after the national workshop in May 2023, let's jump back 14 months. "What should we do?" The five of us, the researchers and research assistants, crowds the drawing table, our hub in the open part of the office space at our research institute. The past two weekends we have gone all in to facilitate the training sessions for the newly recruited group of then 12 young emerging co-researchers, and we are exhausted and confused and bewildered. What now? The feeling of having succeeded in training them based on our newly developed framework is superseded by the dread of the imminent data collection period we are now supposed to enter, according to the time schedule of the research proposal that is funded and made operative. It feels like being in jail, doing time, to adhere to someone

45 Göbel et al. 2023.

else's plan for us. It seems absurd that we were part of engineering this project design. We *know* the youth are not ready-made researchers after just 10 hours of training, despite the framework, all the effort put in by everyone involved, and the heaps of food we provided as renumeration. What can we do?

In feeling our collective desperation, Frederick, one of the research assistants by title, but partner and equal by experience, saves us by digging into the treasure trove of his own MA thesis in social work, on social impact and policy change.[46] "Let's start by interviewing the stakeholders in the project", he suggests. "We can team up two senior researchers and two YCSS and do it together. That will be both a soft start of the data collection, and a fruitful way into preparing for the first big hurdle, Living Lab 1." We look at him in grateful awe. Puh. We have a plan. For now.

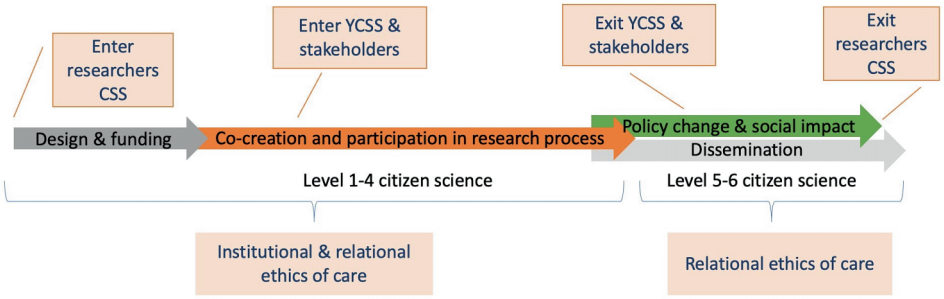
We know from previous research that there is little evidence of how citizen science in social science research might work in practice.[47] One explanation could be that much of the citizen science process is kept in the shadows, not revealing for instance how many more actors that are involved in citizen science than just the researchers and co-researchers, like the stakeholders we interviewed and invited to our Living Labs – making the citizen social science process both messier and mightier.[48]

Emerging from the traditions of AR, PAR and YPAR, we thought we did "normal" citizen social science, until we attended a seminar for the newly established network of Norwegian citizen science researchers last year. Here they referred to what we did as "extreme citizen science". Later, when checking the terminology on google scholar, we discovered that it was not a linguistic innovation by the staff at the council. More people seem to agree with this definition. Scholars have described what they call "levels" of citizen science involvement, from crowdsourcing (level 1) to distributed intelligence (level 2) and participatory science (level 3).[49] The fourth and last level is called extreme citizen science [ECS], where participants are "deeply involved in the research process through co-creation which supports collaboratively identifying the problem, forming the research questions, designing the tools and methods to support data collection, and collecting and analyzing the data".[50] What is extreme about this, we asked ourselves.

With our action research background ingrained in our cells/souls, always aiming to transcend established traditions and structures, and based on our newly acquired empirical knowledge of doing a citizen social science project from start to end, we take the jump and add first a fifth and sixth level to this theory of CS (see Figure 5).

46 Reiersen, F. (2022)
47 Heiss & Matthes (2017), Tauginienė et al. (2020)
48 Göbel et al. (2022).
49 Chiaravalloti et al (2022).
50 Chiaravalloti et al (2022, p.2).

Figure 5: Process of YCSS research – YouCount, with CS level 5 – 6 added.



In this model participants are not only deeply involved in the research process through co-creation which supports collaboratively identifying the problem, forming the research questions, designing the tools and methods to support data collection, and collecting and analyzing the data. They are also active in the dissemination and making actions for policy change and social innovations – not unlike how most P/AR projects are designed.

This is where we are at. Citizen science traditionally mobilizes citizens in research processes, e. g., by collecting data and building a knowledge base for analysis.[51] Participatory Action Research (PAR) is among the epistemic foundations of citizen social science, building on a rich participatory tradition that citizen science of the natural sciences does not adhere to.[52] Action research seems to be re-emerging in new clothes, as a citizen social science approach to address questions of societal transformation and democratization while also doing rigorous research.[53] Finally, we build on transition research that focus on understanding the systemic patterns of inertia and transformation to develop governance strategies to guide and accelerate desired future transitions.[54] What became apparent to us in the process was that we lack the institutional support to do level 5–6. Also, this model does not account for the cyclical nature of curiosity-based research, something that again necessitates an ethics of care. Inspired to go deeper, further, we add a seventh level in this transformative citizen science action research model to include deep involvement in the idea development, design and securing funding of research, a natural closing of the loop (Figure 6).

51 Sauermann et al. (2020).
52 Albert et al. (2021).
53 Greenwood & Levin (2007), Bradbury et al. (2019), Wittmayer et al. (2021).
54 Markard et al. (2012), Loorbach et al. (2017), in Loorbach & Wittmayer (2023).

Figure 6: Model of Action Research with CS level 1–7 where an epistemic ethics of care can be achieved.

With level 6 of CSS, inclusion of citizens in policy change and social innovation, one can enable transformative research and learning, and promote narrative inquiry that makes meanings move.[55] And with level 7, one can make ethics of care an integrated part of the institutional support system of citizen social science, thus achieving an epistemic ethics of care. What we experienced throughout the 18 months of engagement with the young citizen social scientists, was how their involvement was fundamentally changing the research position, adding a multiplicity of roles and complexity to the traditional role-hierarchy of student-teacher relations in academia. The youth were moving from a collaborator position in action research and YPAR, to becoming partners and sometimes also leaders of processes in citizen social science.

6. Desperation, part III: Youth becoming temporary leaders of the process

Back in January 2023, I, Sara, ask the co-researchers, "Why do you think it didn't go as planned?". We are debriefing a field trip to the local youth club that took place the previous week. Our goal was to promote the newly launched YouCount App, which we intended to use as a tool for data collection. Within the natural sciences, there is a long tradition of using apps in citizen science projects. Inspired by this, we collaborated with Spotteron, a company specializing in developing apps for citizen science projects, to create our own app in the project. Before heading to the youth club, my colleague Ingar, five co-researchers, and I met at a nearby library to prepare. Together, we created a presentation and planned a fun competition to engage the youth. However, upon our arrival at the youth club, we found that the youths

55 Bochner & Herrmann 2020.

were uninterested in our presentation and unwilling to engage with us. They were busy doing homework or playing video games together. We stayed there for an hour before admitting defeat. As we later explained to the co-researchers, failed field trips are more common than successful ones when doing fieldwork.

We are now back at our safe base at the Intercultural Museum, discussing what went wrong. After a few minutes of silence, Amir, one of the co-researchers, hesitantly said, 'Ehm… I don't know, but maybe nobody wanted to talk to us because *you* were there.' My fellow researcher Ingar and I look at each other – why didn't we think of this? The other youths agreed with Amir. The presence of adult researchers made the atmosphere too serious for a youth club. Two of the young co-researchers wanted to go back alone to try again. This time, they managed to talk to all the youths hanging out at the youth club – and many of them downloaded the YouCount app, to Ingar's joy and relief.

One month later, in February 2023, we are sitting together again, planning our second dialogue forum; an event where local youths were to be invited to participate in a workshop centred around social inclusion, preferably using the YouCount app as a place-based observation and reflection tool. Ideas were swirling around the table, and suddenly, one of the youths proposed that the young co-researchers themselves could take on a facilitative role for the workshop. Hearing this I, Sara, almost got goosebumps – we finally succeeded in our efforts to teach them enough science for them to be "acting as scientists"[56]; I thought, the youths don't need us anymore.

Fast forward – about four months later, nearing the end of the projects' involvement of youth, I had a conversation with Maryam, one of the co-researchers. I asked her if we, the researchers, should have done anything differently throughout the project. She responded, "You [all the researchers] are too chill, you should have been stricter with us. You could almost have treated us like children sometimes, just giving us specific tasks".

Reflecting on this when writing this paper, it becomes evident to me that the desire to become superfluous has deeply ingrained itself in both me and my colleagues over the years. Even though our objective in the YouCount project was to train the youths to become co-researchers who would be involved in the research as co-creators, we, without articulating it, struggled to make them into autonomous researchers who could do research independently. We wanted to become superfluous. However, as becomes evident in the conversation I had with Maryam, the youths didn't need that – they wanted to be guided and supported in a balancing act of care taking and letting go.

7. Looking ahead: The transformative practices of citizen social science action research

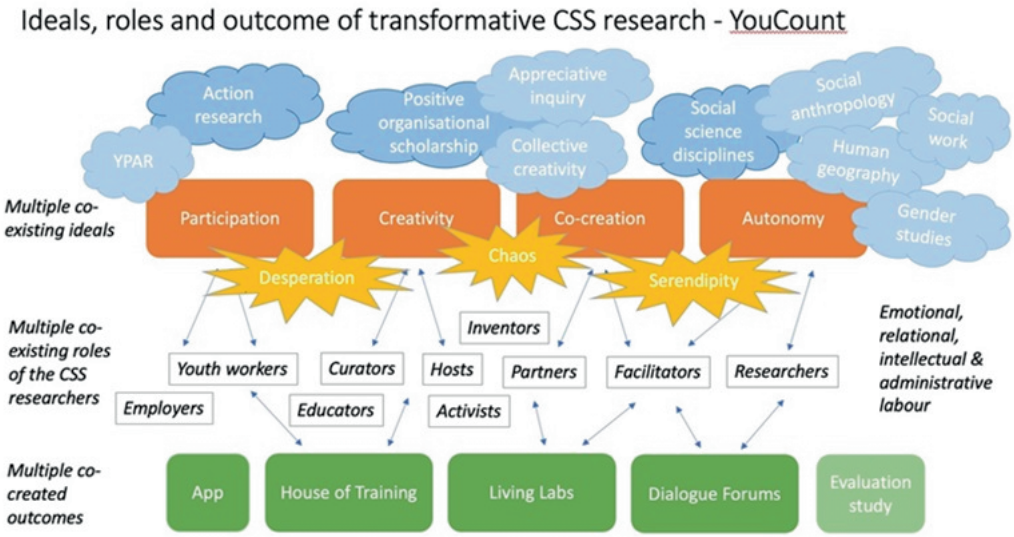
As the article seems to be coming to an end, the need arises again. Walking the article takes me downtown this time, I crisscross the busy Sunday streets of Grønland, the east side area where our team of co-researchers have investigated social inclusion of local youth for what seems like forever. The September sun leads me to the familiar Indian diner, our haunt for the

56 Solé et al. 2023.

lengthier workshop debriefs. With a keema nan in hand and bugs in my brain, I balance my thoughts on a tightrope of familiar and new, revolt and acceptance.

When writing this text, we started reflecting upon our multiple, sometimes conflicting roles when doing citizen social science. We have become inventors of transformative learning, curators of curiosity and hosts of community, youth workers and employers, facilitators, and activists for change. All this and more. It is emotional, relational, intellectual, and administrative labor all at once. And it feels quite precarious. The time available is never enough.

Figure 7: Ideals, roles, and outcome of transformative CSS research in the Norwegian case of the YouCount project.



Our haphazard mix of scholarly backgrounds (the clouds in Figure 7) surely contributed to a cacophony of voices, a mix of approaches, methods and trust building tactics that enabled this diverse group of Oslo youth with multicultural backgrounds to be actual contributors to social science, to gain or even claim epistemic justice, like Amina's statement above exemplifies. The multiplicity inspired a resource intensive and demanding process of exploration, building not only on action research, YPAR and our multiple social science disciplinary backgrounds, but also on literature of positive organizational scholarship (POS), appreciative inquiry and collaborative creativity.[57] We found our roles being multiplied by the second, as we were aiming for the planned outcomes of our scientific endeavors.

Our motivation for social change, co-created research outcomes *and* securing ethics of care reveals the need for institutional change in our science support infrastructure. Part of this change is to look again at the roles in the co-creation practices of AR, (Y)PAR and CSS, to open for youth being co-creators and leaders of research process without losing the ethics of care practices. This necessitates critical and emotional reflexivity, an introspection of the

57 Carlsen et al 2012b, Cooperrider & Srivasta 1987, Ludema et al. 2006.

researcher role, and the degree of citizen and researcher engagement. Particularly it demands a rethinking of the design of research processes: what is included as research and what is not?

Labelling something as extreme makes the reachable horizon behind unattainable. This far but not further, it seems to us that scholars say when they define just the core of research practices – the data collection – as valuable enough for collaboration with outsiders.[58] We have become all-rounders, generalists in survival mode, improvising, using our co-acquired skill and tactic. We are not alone though. Rather than focusing on reproducing (disciplinary) knowledge, more and more scholars argue for the emergence of alternative approaches to science, be it reparative, engaged, transformative, or sustainability research – and to education, such as transformative learning.[59] They are also realizing as we do, that "it becomes increasingly clear that traditional, disciplinary academic structures are often unfit to accommodate such new forms of research and education".[60] At worst these structures are actually "working against forms of research and education that support sustainability transitions".[61]

8. The end is just the beginning

We will give voice again, to Maryam's words from the beginning of this exploration.

> Maryam: And look where we are now.
>
> (From debrief with YCSS after national workshop May 24, 2023)

Maryam revealed in front of the whole, diverse team, that she didn't think in the beginning of her involvement, one and a half years ago, that she would have reached this far. The epistemic injustice the youth has become accustomed to has taken its toll. I look at her across the room, I swallow. My eyes burn. The sensory experience of being in that room together, finally sharing the backstage[62] of the research project – the reflexive space where we discuss the event on equal footing, like colleagues, becomes a shared feeling of fulfilment. The long set of tables in the middle, the young people mixed with senior researchers, adults. The faces of youth, some we haven't seen since before the high school and university exam period started a couple of months ago. Sensing gratitude, calmness, pride and tingling of tears inside.

This is the first and to be frank, only such serene moment we experienced together in the 18 months we've worked as a citizen social science team. It is rare, precious, and fleeting. It feels both normal *and* extreme, simultaneously. From our joint experience over these years, we have realized that it is the level of emotional and relational attachment created and recreated throughout the bumpy road of an experimental research process that in practice should define co-creative citizen social science as extreme. Not the number of parts of the process of science you have accommodated for outsiders to partake in.

And then again, with the looming scenarios of a rapidly heating planet, and the numerous exclusion mechanisms that this will accelerate for all vulnerable citizens (which will be most of us), we think it is wise to preserve the term "extreme" for the times of uncertainty and

58 Chiaravalloti et al (2022).
59 Loorbach & Wittmayer (2023).
60 Trencher et al. (2014).
61 Fazey et al. (2021) in Loorbach & Wittmayer (2023).
62 Goffman (1959).

hardship that likely will come. We argue for caution when it comes to applying such enchanting characteristics to co-created approaches to science, and rather emphasis the need to explicitly venture for a more ethics of care-based approach, where transformative research and learning is seen as a necessary way of conducting responsible research to co-create a more sustainable and co-habitable planet. Can Aina's efforts of "chasing balloons" all over the city to complement the young citizen social scientists' ideas on how to disseminate our findings in a curated museum space, be called research? It sure didn't feel like it at the time. Now, after walking the article, together with companion species of all kinds, we see it differently. Chasing balloons, the symbols of hope, opportunity, and openness to the unknown, is maybe the most important scientific practice we can engage in, to secure the epistemic justice, abundance and ethics of care in future citizen social science and action research.

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Book Review

Ausi Told Me: (Re)inventing Action Research from South African Tradition

Carolina Schenatto da Rosa, Danilo R. Streck, Richard Ennals

> This work argues that everyday decolonial-knowledge ecologies on the Cape Flats provide important pointers for reimagining the hybridised, precolonial pasts. Ausidi (first-born daughters; female knowledge-keepers) were and continue to be profound intergenerational knowledge-holders of those pasts. (Bam, 2021, p. XI).

With these words, June Bam opens the preface of her book, posing a challenge to our understanding and reflection. We intend to do justice to the author, who intensely lives the reality of the indigenous peoples of the Cape Region in South Africa and reflects this throughout her work. Likewise, we aim to immerse ourselves in the ways of producing and reproducing knowledge and life as depicted in the stories of women. We acknowledge that we will fall short of our promises and intentions to both the author and the culture of these peoples, who have privileged us with the learnings we share in this review, but we also understand that this is part of the experience and learning in intercultural contexts.

Ausi Told Me is of special interest to the investigative community that is anchored in the principles and strategies of action research. June Bam helps us understand how people's actions, thoughts and feelings are based on life stories that are renewed and recreated from generation to generation, revealing the leading role of women in producing knowledge of resistance and transformation. That is why the methodological aspects are highlighted in this review, such as the notion of *lalela*, translated as deep listening.

In the preface, the author outlines four assumptions that will guide her arguments: a critique of the "discourse of extinction," meaning that indigenous peoples disappeared along with their knowledge; a critique of an essentialist view of the San and Khoi peoples, who inhabited the Cape region, overlooking their cultural hybridity; a critique of the postmodernist discourse that land claims are based on an identity politics constructed during apartheid and are therefore false; a critique of the historical-materialist Marxist discourse that the assertion of "indigeneity" is confined to tribal and racial thinking. These are critical assumptions of broad scope that serve as reference points for dialogue with other realities. It is in the specificity of the Khoi-San peoples that lies the originality that invites us to disclose new perspectives on who we are and how we view others.

After this brief introduction, we situate the author and her context. It is important to note that this is a region of South Africa which, among many others, contributes to the country's cultural richness. A brief presentation of the book's structure follows, highlighting certain aspects in each part and chapter to provide a panoramic view of the content and the author's line of argument. In a third section, the review focuses on some concepts that in our reading emerged as particularly relevant to the methodological discussion, without claiming to present

them as the main or central ones: the role of women in the intergenerational production and reproduction of knowledge; *lalela*, deep listening, as a research methodology; Herstory as a critique of patriarchal historiography; and positionality as a political strategy and a critical stance for action research. Finally, we emphasize the methodological contributions of *Ausi Told Me* to action research. We highlight how the historical, cultural, and political richness of South Africa offer new dimensions of participatory engagement and critical reflection to research, revealing the full potential of (re)invention and re-signification that Bam's work offers to action research.

The Author and Her Context

One of the lessons the book imparts is that it is the forgotten biographies, those overlooked by "official" history, that enable us to reconstruct a herstorical knowledge of Southern Africa. Telling the story of June Bam is to narrate an intergenerational tale, a story that is not hers alone. Therefore, we choose to begin with May, her Ausi. June's mother. May lived and died in the Cape Flats, a poor region southwest of Cape Town. This area became the relocation site for black and indigenous populations post-apartheid. May attended school only once, for on her first day, the teacher declared she was "too indigenous" to be there. Subsequently, her classroom became the savannah. There, alongside her mother, grandmother, and great-aunts, she learned about medicine, biology, history, language, astronomy… She learned to read, write, and to listen – to seriously heed the wind, the past, the dreams. To listen to a world different from that taught in the "traditional" school she was expelled from.

May learned Khoekhoegowab, the click language considered primitive and wild. Through this language, the knowledge of the Ausidi (plural of Ausi) is passed down generations. But for many years May denied her past, concealing this tradition from her daughters, fearing apartheid and the fate of the "nothing-people" – as the indigenous Khoi and San were called. Her fear translated into silence. It was only at the age of 70 that May revealed to her daughters that she could speak Khoekhoegowab and the symbolic universe it represents. According to June, Ausi May felt a political and historical necessity to keep the tradition alive in the present and assert that Khoi-San culture is not about an extinct people, a memory of the past. Thus, as an adult, June discovered her mother's indigenous identity.

Identifying as Khoi-San was dangerous and shameful, considered "non-human," "primitive," the indigenous were systematically annihilated. Women, deemed "excessive in the Cape" and "too dangerous" by the colonial regime for their knowledge and formative role, were tortured, incarcerated, and mass-executed (BAM, 2014). Khoi-San, therefore, is an "umbrella" term, encompassing various indigenous populations of Southern Africa sharing cultural and linguistic roots. Over the centuries, these populations suffered genocide and epistemicide, and were often labeled as "extinct" by historiography and anthropology – a notion contributing to the generic and racist classification of coloureds by apartheid policy.

In one of her many works on the subject, June Bam (2014) analyzes the implications of this epistemicide on 21st-century indigenous activism, arguing that two decades post-apartheid, the "coloured" classification continues as a standard for population categorization,

making Khoi-San activism centrally about identity and belonging – a process that, as seen in the reviewed work, directly depends on the knowledge shared by the Ausidi.

But contextualizing this erasure policy doesn't mean June Bam grew up detached from her Khoi and San heritage. Since birth, she was tasked with "preserving indigenous history and dignity," a responsibility she took very seriously. Throughout her childhood, she and her sisters were taken by their mother to the savannah, where they learned to read time from the earth, about survival, herbology, history, and biology. She was born and raised learning about the knowledge accumulated by her foremothers, about preserving it, and about women's responsibility in this process. It is they who narrate the Khoi-San story. All sacred, ancestral knowledge is feminine. In this effort to preserve the past, June learned the power of dreams and visions. She recounts that on Sundays, the girls would gather with the matriarchs, the Ausidi, to discuss the meaning of dreams, their predictive power, and connection to the departed. From her mother, June learned an important lesson: the role of an Ausi is to listen and listen, to hear deeply, then speak.

Over the years, June has listened to and recorded many stories from the Cape, challenging traditional historiography and integrating intergenerational knowledge (dreams, visions, rituals, …) into academic knowledge not just as a source, but as a theoretical-methodological basis for research. In the last three decades, she has held management positions in various public bodies in South Africa and the United Kingdom, besides teaching at several universities, including Stanford University, Kingston University, York University, University of Cape Town, and currently, University of Johannesburg. As a recognition of her work, it's worth noting that in 2008, a research-intervention project she led won the UNESCO Peace Education Award; in 2020, the book "Whose History Counts: Decolonising precolonial historiography," she was lead conceptual editor of, in partnership with Lungisile Ntsebeza and Allan Zinn, was a finalist in the HSS Awards, and in 2023, this honour was bestowed upon the author's own work, "Ausi Told Me: Why Cape Herstoriographies Matter".

What We Find in the Book

The book is structured in four parts, comprising a total of ten chapters, in addition to an Introduction and an Appendix where short life stories of the interviewed women are shared. In the Introduction, the author deeply identifies with the people whose memories she seeks to bring to light as indicators of alternative paths for academia and life on the planet, among humans and with nature. She introduces readers to the concept of Ausi, which in the language of the San and Khoi peoples means "older sister" and is derived from Aus, referring to water, denoting "source," "blood," and "serpent." From the study of terminology – in a section preceding the Introduction – June argues that "the source represents the flow of knowledge, the blood symbolizes immortality, and the serpent suggests wisdom" (p. xxvii). She emphasizes in the Introduction her methodological concern stemming from the need for radical changes to understand the past and present. Deep listening, a profound attentiveness, emerges as an alternative to herstoriography, the historiography of and by women.

Part I is dedicated to outlining the methodological panorama in three chapters. The first chapter illustrates how the historiography of colonization aimed not only to render invisible

but to erase the history of the region's indigenous peoples, casting doubt on the archives of the time. The pressing question for historiography, therefore, is how to deconstruct these narratives within a decolonial framework. The second chapter argues that there are possibilities for decolonizing Eurocentric historiography by considering the San and Khoi not just in terms of knowledge, but especially in ways of knowing. This is followed by a critical reflection on how to provide the indigenous people access to their own historiography, disclosing complex layers of epistemicide and "linguicide."

The two chapters in Part 2 inform about the selection criteria for the women and men participating in the research, including: a) having a reputation in their communities for possessing such knowledge; b) having a close relationship with the Ausidi; c) having the means to demonstrate their knowledge of plants, cures, and rituals in their environment. The fragments of stories lead us to another world and way of conceiving the world. For instance, the daily life was full of visions and predictions, readings of signs from swamps, insects, animals, and the mountain. From listening to the wind to the colour of the sun, everything spoke and taught. In summary, these are stories that encapsulate the results of deep listening in the construction and transfer of intergenerational knowledge through the Ausidi.

Part 3, with four chapters, is titled "Epistemicide." June Bam identifies seven types of concurrent erasures: genocide, the attempt to kill the indigenous peoples; epistemicide, the attempt to erase knowledge; culturicide, the attempt to erase culture; linguicide, the attempt to erase language; botanicide, the loss of plants; floricide, the loss of flower richness; and faunacide, the loss of the animal kingdom. According to her, this compulsive process of extinction was never fully achieved, largely due to the generational chain established by women. We will take a more detailed look at this process of erasure in the next topic. Or, as June Bam argues, attempts at erasure because there is some survival in all the strategies of silencing or death.

The fourth part consists of a brief but dense eleven-page chapter, which the author titles "How Listening to These Stories Can Help Us Rethink the Curriculum and Research Methods on the Ancient Historiography of the Cape." She revisits the concept of *lalela*, deep listening, as a reference for both teaching and research methodology. Next, we select some concepts that seem central to understanding the reach of the work.

Key Concepts: Thinking with the Author

The book *Ausi Told Me* explores various key concepts for understanding how indigenous knowledge and its forgotten past are central to comprehending the historiography of the Cape and its implications for the present. Moreover, the work allows for thinking beyond the local context. In addressing colonialism and its consequences, culminating in apartheid, June Bam presents essential theoretical-methodological tools for understanding equity and social justice. We highlight four interconnected topics from the book that provide a profound reflection on history and intergenerational knowledge in the Cape region. The first topic explores the importance of deep listening as a method of reassessing official history, confronting colonial records with Khoi and San voices. The second topic highlights the role of Ausi in intergenerational transmission. The third topic discusses the concept of herstoriography, aiming to

include female voices and address the omissions of dominant history. Finally, the fourth topic considers the spaces of original knowledge in the Cape region and their potential for resistance and recreation.

Lalela: Deep Listening as a Methodological Reference

"Listen, listen, and listen. Then, deeply listen" – These were May's instructions to June for preserving intergenerational knowledge. Deep listening, as a method, allowed the author a "total reassessment of official history" (p. 201), reorienting critical research agendas towards "traditional" historiography through sources other than colonial archives. To confront these records (largely produced by white men) and suspend these "sources" of South African history, deep listening proposes triangulating the historical archive (a product of colonial logic) with past voices ignored by this "official source" and current Khoi and San stories.

Listen, listen, and listen (*Lalela*) is thus a political and pedagogical process that keeps alive cultural heritages, traditions, spiritual beliefs, and sociopolitical organization of the Cape region since pre-colonial South Africa. Furthermore, it places into perspective the indigenous knowledge accumulated and shared by the Ausidi. This process, as June Bam shows in her book, requires sensitivity and rigor. Over five years (2015–2020), the author conducted interviews with sources of intergenerational knowledge (Ausi) in Cape Flats and other regions of the Cape. In these interviews, she listened to the past and its effects on the present. Listening to the past, as a research movement, challenges the researcher to attentively distinguish between memory and history. Deep listening is not about hearing memory, the individual perception that transforms over time; it is about hearing history and, in the storyteller's voice, other voices. This requires sensitivity, as it is not merely passive listening, but a vigilant exercise to set aside "truth" notions or prejudices; to suspend judgment and create a deep connection between the storyteller and the listener. It demands sensitivity, as it deals with a history of lives and distinct times, a collective history.

Rigor is required because *Lalela*, the Nguni word for "listen," entails a holistic process. It's an invitation to reflect on one's own position and the power dynamics at play in historical narratives, through a set of movements that include meditation, walking in nature, writing… It is listening with the whole body, feeling the environment as a whole. In methodological terms, this demands rigor because these movements are ritualistic and transformative, requiring from the listener a (self-)reflective and active stance. Rigor is also needed because there's an ethical dimension of respect and recognition in the co-production of knowledge that "involves not only deeply listening to the often-repressed indigenous voices in post-apartheid South Africa but also allowing them to reconfigure the past through their stories" (p. 239–240).

As a decolonial response to studies developed on Khoi and San (and the narratives built from them), the method of deep listening does not seek to erase or invalidate the knowledge produced so far. On the contrary, it is through dialogue with traditional historiography that listening and hearing are possible. Through rigorous dialogue, which often opposes and sometimes breaks with knowledge built by colonial logic, critical and georeferenced knowledge is produced. Thus, this listening does not translate into recovering the past, but rather, projecting a new future from it. Deep listening represents, in this dialogue, an epistemic

shift in the way science is produced, starting from an ecosystem, an "invisible archive," and an "intangible data" not only as a source but also as an ethos of research. Throughout the work, June Bam argues and reiterates that *Lalela* is a pedagogical alternative to decolonize the curriculum and promote historical reparation in South African universities by ensuring access to their own history as a source of teaching and research.

Ausi and Intergenerational Knowledge

Education involves the relationship between people situated within generations, which in turn develop certain knowledge and ways of knowing. Although technological advancements have changed the predominantly unidirectional relationship from the older to the younger generations, older generations are not exempt from transmitting their values and knowledge to the new generations, which they do in various implicit or explicit ways. June Bam analyzes how this transmission in the Cape region, among the Khoi and San, is carried out by women, playing a role of resistance throughout colonization.

Usually, it is the firstborn who is tasked with learning from the Ausi how to preserve the intergenerational memory of the family and all the knowledge contained within it. This memory includes the pains and traumas, the strategies of survival and preservation, the language (the learning process is done only in the Khoi-San language), and all the knowledge of geography, herbology, medicine, history, architecture, arts, among many other areas, acquired over the centuries and kept alive since the pre-colonial period. Intergenerational knowledge is thus the understanding and maintenance of history from the female perspective and agency – hence, in the work, the author uses the expression herstory. In English, the first syllable of the word "history" (his-to-ry) corresponds to the possessive pronoun "his"; replacing the masculine pronoun with the feminine one both opposes a patriarchal colonial logic, where knowledge is produced, interpreted, and recorded by men, and signals that the practice of "their history" predates the arrival of "his history".

Maintaining this intergenerational knowledge is, besides a respect for one's own culture, the past and the future, a form of activism that has been gaining space in the academic context. From a methodological perspective, it is possible to find in positionality the principles of constructing intergenerational knowledge. In the dynamics of research, positionality implies constructing a shared identity among those involved in the process that is historically, theoretically, and epistemologically located. Part of the process of situating this knowledge in time and space involves deeply listening to intergenerational knowledge. Therefore, positionality in the context of South African methodologies and epistemologies comprises the dimension of the present and past both on the physical and spiritual plane.

Herstoriography: Producing Positional Knowledge

In proposing to rescue the history of the Cape from "their" narrative, Bam seeks to compose a more inclusive, realistic, and coherent scenario of the past and present South African. Their

history (herstory) adds to the movement of deep listening to include these voices in History and to discuss their omissions. Writing about what Ausi told means opposing the dominant history through the stories of her family, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs, providing valuable information about the experiences lived by indigenous communities and deepening the senses of knowledge (in its artistic, linguistic, scientific, spiritual dimensions…) produced about and in the region.

As the book shows us, in Khoi-San culture, knowledge is feminine; that is, women are the bearers of ancestral knowledge and are responsible for keeping alive the traditions, stories, and cultural practices for future generations, whether through rituals, songs, dances, books, or narratives. Starting from this assumption, it can be said that the history of the Cape is (and always has been) "their history". With the process of colonization, there was an attempt to systematically erase the knowledge, perspectives, and voices of these women, resulting in the weakening of the cultural and historical identity of Khoi-San women and the stereotyping/objectification of their bodies.

Herstoriography seeks to recognize this role and value the feminine contributions to the social, political, economic, and cultural construction of the Cape region. Telling their story is a movement that extends to promoting social justice and gender equity. By recovering the role of the Ausidi, June Bam brings to the forefront a figure that, through historiography, was erased from collective memory. Challenging epistemicide and rescuing the voices of indigenous women, *Ausi Told Me* confronts historical inequalities and stimulates critical reflection on the patriarchal structures that still persist in society by including in the "official history" these knowledge and perspectives, (re)turning these women into protagonists in/from the historical narrative.

It is worth noting that in the work, "their historiography" is made from a specific place: the Ausi. This means that it is not a historiography from the female point of view, but rather a historiography of indigenous women, of the Khoi-San tradition. By doing this, Bam brings herstoriography closer to the concept and practice of positionality. This approach recognizes that our identities, experiences, and perspectives are affected by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, among other factors, intersectionally; emphasizing that we are not neutral spectators, that we do not produce knowledge detached from a particular political and social position.

Between Erasure, Resistance, and Recreation

The author identifies three major platforms or spaces of original knowledge in the Cape Region (p. 31). The first is linked to a revivalist movement around rituals, occupation movements, and the recovery of languages lost with the imposition of the colonizers' language. The second is a hybrid knowledge space that relates pre-colonial knowledge with that brought by Muslims and Indians connected to the Indian Ocean slave trade. A third type of knowledge among the San and Khoi is hidden in invisible or rendered-invisible networks, and therefore, rarely available in the canons of historiography. It is in this space of knowledge production and reproduction, considered by her the most authentic, that lies June Bam's interest, and for this reason, it carries the greatest potential for knowledge recreation.

We have already mentioned the seven types of erasure that the author identifies. To the more known erasures or extermination of peoples, knowledge, culture, language, and fauna, June includes plants (botanicide) and particularly flowers (floracide) for what they represented to the peoples of the region. The book presents images of flowers that, along with their beauty, also represented sources of healing and nourishment. The understanding of "empty land," with the concomitant arbitrary renaming of places, was also accompanied by the non-recognition of the region's animal life and plants.

This erasure occurs in various ways, of which we highlight a few. The human, plant, and animal trafficking and the transplanting of exotic species. The colonizers were not satisfied with collecting plants and animals, but also took "human specimens" for exhibition. This ties in with colonial cartography that separated and classified indigenous peoples without considering their history and relations. This corroborated the narrative of empty land with the understanding that the inhabitants did not offer resistance beyond sporadic retaliations, lacking agency.

The classification included a racial pyramid in which whites and Indians corresponded, respectively, to the first and second caste, and the coloured – a mix of European, Oriental, and African attributes – to the third caste. African blacks occupied the lowest scale of this pyramid. Given the disputes around who is what in the time of apartheid, June questions, without denying the existence of superficial human differences such as physical features, how relevant is the discourse of "physical type" to overcome discrimination based on physiological essentialism, labeling, and classifications. The book especially highlights the colonial and Apartheid racist classification of Khoena women as overly sexual and carriers of contagious diseases.

This erasure is also found in "modern" theories with a progressive tone. For instance, June criticizes the Marxist paradigm of historical materialism that studied the San and Khoi within the framework of "modes of production" as resistant to modernity, disregarding the potential for validation of new knowledge through tradition and oral history.

Final Considerations

"Ausi Told Me" is a book rooted in the South African region of the Cape. At the same time, the region's own history is woven with threads that extend to the world. There are the Portuguese in their conquest expeditions, the Indians and Muslims brought from the East, and the European conquerors who with apartheid staged one of the saddest chapters of colonization. In these final considerations we highlight some challenges and opportunities posed to action research as a worldwide and diverse community. It needs to be acknowledged that June Bam does not announce her book as an action research project. However, it is our understanding that much can be learned for action research theory and practice when the book is read from this perspective.

June Bam reveals how the seeds for transformative action are deeply rooted in cultural traditions that survived colonization and exploitation. Action research involves *lalela*, deep listening that is part and parcel of lasting and meaningful transformative acting. When pronouncing the words that survived linguicide or when naming and cultivating the flowers that

survived floricide the community's world is no longer the same. It is a world that recovers its richness generated through countless generations. *Lalela* involves the commitment and risk to dive with mind and body in the other's culture.

A second remark is the role of women as producers and reproducers of knowledge. The narratives bring the protagonism of women in the preservation of memory as a bearer of hope. We are not presented with a generalized denunciation of patriarchy, but with the marks of sexist and racist domination on the very bodies of women who, nonetheless are the carriers of knowledge that preserves the community's survival and that in a patriarchally driven market are suppressed. The book challenges action researchers to have a closer look at gender both in terms of particular knowledges, and as other ways of coproducing knowledge.

Lastly, June Bam invites us to broaden the scope of action research traditions. We are glad to see this review being published in a special issue of Action Research in what can be regarded as the embryo of a Turkish tradition. It is a beautiful landscape where, in every corner of the world, communities are engaged in pronouncing their world through collective critical action, from Scandinavia with democratic dialogue, to Spain with action research for territorial development, to North America with community based action research, to Latin America with systematization of experience.

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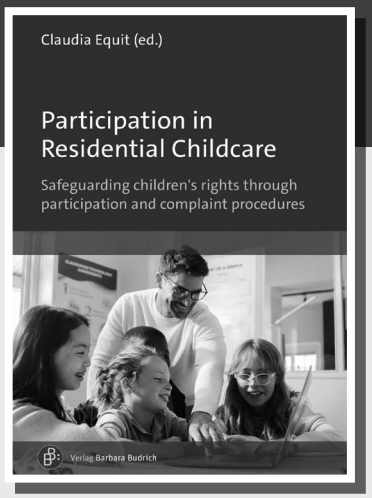

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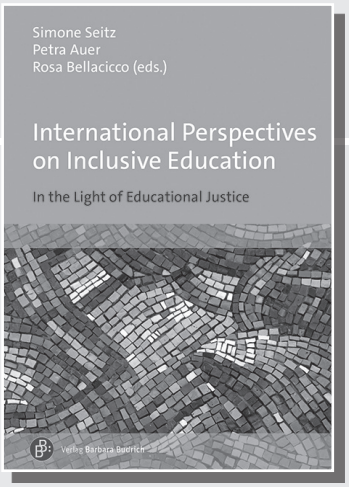

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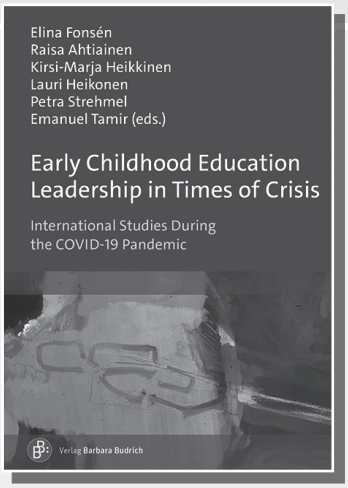

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