

ACTION RESEARCH SIG

Newsletter

August 2018



1. Purpose

The focus of this Special Interest Group is the development of action research as a paradigm, a methodology and a practice-changing practice. In this turbulent and fast-changing world, we are increasingly faced with complex problems that impact on, and have implications for, education. Action research provides us with a culturally and socially responsible way to generate knowledge that will help us to negotiate these 'wicked' problems. We concur with Freire, who said that education is not about training people to adapt to the world: we should be enabling them to change it. We position action research as a paradigm, grounded in definite, life-enhancing values and principles that underpin an inclusive and dynamic worldview. It is based on constructivist and critical theories that acknowledge that there can never be a final solution to any problem; that there are many equally valid ways to envisage what is perceived as reality; and that ongoing improvement is attained through critical reflection of the *status quo*, which understanding is followed by action to improve the situation. The Action Research SIG aims to create a space where action researchers of all genres who aim to bring about contextually and culturally relevant and sustainable educational change can learn from and with each other.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact the convener: lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za

2. SIG Activities

We have an **annual symposium** at the SAERA conference, where we interact on a topic related to the conference theme and invite interested members to present.

We aim to run **workshops** or other events at least once during the year.

We can produce a **special issue** for the Journal of Education or other journals.

In **2016 Action Research SIG Symposium** at the University of the Free State, with Prof Melanie Walker of UFS as keynote speaker on, "**Participatory/Action Research: Reflections, Experiences, Capabilities**", followed by small group work around the topic.

In **2017** we held a workshop on **Decolonizing teacher education and educational research** at North-West University, Potchefstroom attended by 56 delegates from various universities in the country. Prof Aslam Fataar, Stellenbosch University, presented six points in his keynote address to stimulate delegate thinking around the topic before exploring relevant questions in a World Cafe.

In **2018**, we had a workshop with Dr Maria Elena Torre from City University of New York on **Engaging in critical participatory action research: theory, methods and ethics**, attended by 24 researchers from UFS, NMU, UJ, UKZN and NWU to strengthen our capacity to do community-based research and to build up the network of PAR researchers.

COMBER recently hosted two very successful workshops on the 6th and 7th of August, presented by Prof Mary Brydon-Miller from the University of Louisville in Kentucky. The workshops covered Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the contributions and ethical challenges of Participatory Action Research.

The PAR workshop introduced participants to the foundational aspects of theory and practice of Participatory Action Research (PAR) with a focus on the practical considerations around researcher roles, community engagement, and methodology. Emerging methods currently being developed by participatory action researchers from around the world were explored and participants contributed potential areas of research and questions related to using PAR methods for discussion.

PAR as a more engaged form of research can bring unique ethical challenges. The ethics workshop offered an opportunity to explore both the contributions that participatory action research can make along with the challenges it can present to researchers and community partners. Participants examined issues related to working alongside university ethical review boards and considerations related to anonymity and confidentiality, ownership and control of data, and emergent research processes.



Dr Marinda Neethling, Dr Elsabé Wessels, Prof Mary Brydon-Miller, Merna Meyer, Melody Mtimkulu, Marike Strydom, Dr Luiza de Sousa, Prof Lesley Wood, Dr Tarsisio Nyatsanza, Corné van der Vyver, Janelize van der Merwe, Dr Nicole Claasen

On 10 and 11 July, Prof Lesley Wood and Prof Mary Brydon-Miller presented an Action Research workshop at **Nelson Mandela University**, attended by 22 academics and PG students.



3. Agenda Action Research SIG Business Meeting

Preliminary points for the agenda:

- a) Vision/purpose of the SIG
- b) International relations with ARNA and CARN
- c) Regional workshops for 2019
- d) Special issue for JOE – 2019
- e) Creating a repository on action research articles
- f) Membership and co-ordination
- g) An institutional survey on what action research initiatives there are in each institution
- h) Other matters

4. SAERA Annual Conference, 22-24 October 2018

Name of Special Interest Group (SIG): Action Research

Title (focus) of sig session:

Making community engagement more responsive to democratic ideals: Towards a new framework for inclusion based on participatory action learning and action research.

Session chair / coordinator, institution, and email address:

Prof Lesley Wood, North-West University, Lesley.wood@nwu.ac.za

Description of session:

This interactive panel session will explore how South African universities can be hubs for both academic attainment and community-based lifelong learning. The inclusion challenge is one response to those who are currently excluded:

'... millions are (still) without an adequate income, dignity or education, without clean water or enough food and medicine and their share of world wealth is diminishing. The case for devising a new curriculum to address these issues is self-evident. The challenge centres on: the problem of delivering institutionally-based learning and accreditation to very poor communities who cannot afford to pay for it and the thorny issue of whether the knowledge taught is actually relevant to the people and communities who need it.' [Extract from an unpublished working paper 'Community engagement, future learning and the university' (July 2016) James Nyland, David Davies and Emer Clarke.

The barrier seems to be that even though universities may want to enhance the scope and effectiveness of their community engagement, strategies and frameworks on how to do this are lacking. To address this gap, representatives of North-West University, the University of the Free State, and Nelson Mandela University began to explore this issue in November 2015, and by 2018, Rhodes University and Stellenbosch University were also participating in the creation of a framework for wider inclusion using a practical and holistic system for lifelong learning developed by the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL). GULL is a non-profit network movement that works with other organizations around the world to facilitate self-help in communities. As GULL has its own award system, it is possible to recognize the outcomes of community engagement separately from the host university's own academic awards.

The piloting work has been informed by established approaches to community-based research to counter the fact that research policies, procedures, rules and regulations are primarily written for university-led research rather than to enable wider and deeper engagement with catchment area communities. The new framework will facilitate much wider public recognition of the learning and development of community partners. The approach does not however require them to enrol in formal education programmes with all the related cost implications and access requirements.

The panel session will include case study examples of progress made by several of the participating universities and an opportunity to discuss how other universities can join the initiative and build on all that has been learnt during the piloting phase.

Names, institution and email addresses of each panellist (including respondent):

Bruce Damons – Nelson Mandela University - bruce.damons@mandela.ac.za

Lynne Damons – Stellenbosch University – l.damons@sun.ac.za

Richard Teare – Global University for Lifelong Learning – richard@gullonline.org

Karen Venter – University of the Free State - VenterK1@ufs.ac.za

Heila Lotz-Sisitka – Rhodes University (respondent) h.lotz-sisitka@ru.ac.za