Action research as innovative means to self-study: A quest for 'thinking out of my box'!

OER Africa/SAIDE Convening

17-18 May, Nairobi

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Structure of Keynote Address

De-construct, starting with the self
Note that You are Key and as a collective you are invited to co-address/construct meaning

- Living my educational values
- Introducing innovative ideas and whole brain (participatory) action research; auto-ethnography as self-study
- Your active participation
- Your critical observations

Based on the ontological-epistemological questions:
- Who am I? (AR)
- Who are we? (PAR)
Let’s Play
the Diversity Game …

• Individually prioritise the 6 cards received in order of preference
• Which one suits your way of doing best; which one does not really fit?
• You have 30 seconds
• Compare your choices with your neighbour(s) – especially discuss your first and last choice (30 seconds)
What is your preference?

• What do we learn from this simple exercise?
  - Comfort zone: Challenge – beyond comfort zone
  - Need for adapting teaching/thinking/research
    - becoming an adaptable professional
    - whole brain thinking
  - Challenge students – beyond comfort zone (maximizing potential)
• Impact on: - Professional development
• - Scholarship of teaching (andragogy)
  - Research scholarship
  - Scholarship of engagement
Practical Application

• Write down the first observation that comes to mind when looking at the next scene on the screen
Let’s compare …

• Responses by those with blue cards …
• … responses by the greens …
• … the reds …
• … the yellows …
What do we learn from this exercise?
We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are ...
Let’s have a look at the theory........
Ned Herrmann (1995)
Our different selves

- **A** Intellectual
  - Logical
  - Analytical
  - Fact Based
  - Quantitative

- **D** Experimental
  - Holistic
  - Intuitive
  - Integrating
  - Synthesizing

- **Left Mode**
  - Sequential
  - Organized
  - Detailed
  - Planned

- **Right Mode**
  - Interpersonal
  - Feeling Based
  - Kinesthetic
  - Emotional

- **Safekeeping**
  - B

- **Emotional**
  - C
Examples of Individual Profiles

I

II

III

IV
First Year Composite Group Profile (n=1004)
What do you think would a typical profile of a medical student look like?
What do you think would a typical profile of an engineering student look like?
Group Profiles

IT (n = 132)  

Medical (n = 103)  

Engineering (n = 220)  

Psychology (n = 71)  

Drama/Music (n = 55)
Examples of practical application
Examples from Taxation
Celebration
AR studies across institution(s)

PGCHE students implementing (constructed) ideas in own practice:

• Veterinary Science
• Health Sciences: Public Health, Anatomy, Nursing
• Foundation for Professional Development

• Authentic assessment: Publications, conference papers (e.g. of 12 (former) students at HELTASA)
PAR through academic staff development initiatives

- Family Medicine, Public Health
- Economic and Management Sciences: Taxation
- Engineering: Information Science
  (8 000+ first-year students)

Education innovation awards
- Institutional
- National
Composite group profile of department
Let’s get the energy flowing

...  

What do you see on the next slide? Is the figure turning clockwise or anti-clockwise?
It is quite amazing ...
If you see this lady turning in clockwise you are using your **right brain**

If you see it the other way, you are using **left brain**

Some people do see both ways, but most see it only one way

If you try to see it the other way and if you do, your IQ is above 160 which is almost a genius

Then see if you can make her go one way and then the other by shifting the brain's current

**BOTH DIRECTIONS CAN BE SEEN** – Proved at Yale University, over a 5 year study on the human brain and it's functions. Only 14% of the US population can see her move both ways.
What is your current understanding of AR?

- Share your ideas with your next-door neighbour

- … and PAR?
Action research

Focus of research is on the **I/self**

*I* taking responsibility for monitoring **my**

practice/professional learning

*I* investigating/learning about **Me**

as professional

**Intrapersonal = Self-study**
PAR: Scholarly community of practice

Focus of research is on Us/the We

We taking responsibility for monitoring our practice/professional learning

We investigating/learning about Us as professionals

Interpersonal = self-study as a collective
How do your ideas about AR match the following?

*To research actively is to* **plan**, **act**, **observe** and **reflect** more carefully, more **systematically**, and more **rigorously** than one usually does in **everyday life**; and to **use the relationships between these moments in the process as source of both** **improvement** and **knowledge**.

(Kemmis & McTaggert)

My adaptation: … of both **emancipation/empowerment**; **transformation** and new meaning making/constructing new meaning
Collaborative, critical enquiry by the practitioners themselves (rather than expert researchers) into their own practice, into students’ problems

(Zuber-Skerritt)

My adaptation: … into implementing of innovative ideas
Action research is a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effect of such intervention

(Cohen & Manion)

My adaptation: ... small-scale initiative
... and ...

- It is practitioner-research
- It is done within the context of living theory
- It offers opportunity for developing practice theory

(McNiff & Whitehead)

It has as focus: self-study
New constructs

• Marriage between scholarship of teaching and research scholarship contributing to the wish of the University to be research-intensive

• Deficit approach X asset-based approach
  Assets = self (human capital), innovative idea, thinking preferences, initiative, experiment

• Change/improve X transform
Rationale for using Action Research

- Self-study
- Experimenting with innovative ideas
- Transforming practice
- Deep professional learning
- Professional portfolio building
- Lifelong professional learning
- Scholarly thinking
- Emancipatory
- Intrapersonal development
- Enacting leadership role
- Reflective practitioner, etc
AR is whole brain research

- Experimental
- Intraperonal
- Process
- Constructing new meaning
PAR is whole brain research

- Experimental
- Interpersonal
- Process
- Constructing new meaning
It is about thinking out of the box. Or is it?

- Out of
- My
- Thinking
- Box

- The perfect mismatch
Self-study as autoethnography

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore her personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.
• Autoethnography is a vulnerable, self-reflective form of writing used across various disciplines

• Autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation

(Maréchal 2010)
Social life [education/teaching practice] is messy, uncertain, and emotional. If we desire to research social life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion.

(Adams, 2015)
Visionary AR model = cyclical

- Spiral (spin-off spirals): flowing from context and vision
- Cycles (spin-off cycles)
- Steps
  1. Plan for innovation/transformation = Asset-based: person, potential, thinking preferences
  2. Implement innovation
  3. Reflect (*before action, in action, on action*) (Schön)
  4. Evaluate
  5. New Cycle
     1. Re-plan …

Meta-reflection (last chapter of thesis/dissertation)
Visionary Action research model
(Du Toit)
Visionary Participatory AR (Fringe)
Community of practice
Comprehensive model

• Teaching in colours
• Researching in colours
Based on my presentation, which profile fits me? Substantiate your answer
Non of the above as ...

... they did tests on the 2 hemispheres of my brain, and the result:

a) *In the left, nothing is right!*

b) *In the right, nothing is left!*