

Third Announcement!

Action Learning Action Research Association World Congress 2010

Melbourne, Australia 6th – 9th September

Plus two pre-congress skill-sharing days (4th - 5th)

Presented by ALARA and The Institute of Development Studies
in partnership with Borderlands and oases Graduate School



Participatory Action Research and Action Learning:

Appreciating our Pasts

Comprehending our Presents

Prefiguring our Futures

- **Key Themes of the Congress**
- **Streams of Praxis**
- **Congress Program: the overall flow of conversations**
- **Preliminary Call for Abstracts**
- **Venue**

Like so many initiatives and approaches which appeared - seemingly - out of nowhere during the sixties and seventies, Participatory Action Research (PAR), Action Research (AR) and Action Learning (AL) have come of age and several generations of practitioners have meanwhile added their hearts', hands' and minds' work to the earlier traditions. Differentiations into 'applied fields', journals and second and third editions of 'handbooks', its epistemologies and ways of knowing, its methodologies and methods have become 'standard' fare in reference lists, workshops and course syllabi and these are all signs of a mature and, indeed, worldwide discourse.

As several of the originators of our 'movement' are retiring or have passed away recently, however, it also feels like a transition period and it seems time to take stock and listen to one another across the generations. We need to remember the original impetuses and the responses PAR, AR and AL developed to them and critically examine what has happened with these responses; how have they changed over time, together with the changing contexts we created and inhabit(ed)? It's time to critically but appreciatively assess our present practices, understandings and methodical ways of relating and to dream possible futures - an elemental task given the massive economic, ecological and social contextual changes and predicaments we seem to stand at the confluence of...

Key Themes of the Congress

Following from this, we envisage the Congress to combine a critical and reflective 'genealogical' look at our philosophical foundations with an appreciative look at present – and possibly future – concrete practices in their real-life contexts. The four key 'themes' or thematic areas which evolved out of the discussions in the organising committee may assist in focusing our conversations and presentations and may help in shaping your planned contributions (see "*Invitation to submit Early Abstracts*" below). We also have invited a set of international speakers to help us set the tone for each.

1. Addressing the *philosophical* foundations of action-based and participatory approaches to research and learning: is there a common and united philosophical basis across the various applied fields? Or should we rather accept variety and hybridity as necessary characteristics of the work we do in its several rather distinctive practical and organisational contexts? What have been/are the (latest) developments in the philosophical underpinnings of our approaches? Ontology, epistemology, the value base in which we ground our knowledge and the recognition of the spiritual and relational dimension of our work: how can – and should we – reflectively and practically deepen and extend our understanding of the influence of these on our practice? How do (and should?) other-than-western world views and the trans- and cross-cultural relationships which increasingly characterise our (post-) modern realities influence our practice? And should we not become more attentive to eco-philosophical and eco-ethical dimensions in and of our practice?

2. The theme of *power* and its uses, misuses and abuses in the learning and research relationship has – over time – been receiving varying degrees of attention, even if the ‘action’ and ‘participatory’ references would suggest the theme is central in our work. How is the theme of power – latently or openly - relevant in our practical work situations and how does it manifest in our working relationships? Some authors talk about the re-emergence of ‘class’ in industrialised societies and many see the persistence of other divisions in societies along gender, race, ability, state of ‘development’ and other lines; how do we take account of this reality in our approaches to AL, AR and PAR? How does participatory practice link up with our democratic ideals and the possibility of ‘deliberative’ governance? How does the ‘politics’ of resource allocation, of money and of bureaucracies – state, NGO and corporate – influence or work... for better or worse?

3. Perennial issues of *methodology* should remain central to our deliberations and will hopefully inspire you in your preparations for participants’ own presentation/workshop; how relevant remain questions about quantitative and qualitative approaches, their associated techniques and methods within the context of AR and PAR? What is the nature of the research/learning/consulting *relationship* in AL, AR and PAR? How do we evolve an appropriate process, in terms of timing (slow vs. fast-tracked) ethics, agreements about steps, etc? What are issues surrounding our use of language, our metaphors, especially in contexts characterised by deep divisions as mentioned above? What are we to do with the results of our work... how to negotiate ‘ownership’ of outcomes and the paradoxes between the commercial and the social/ethical? Between the so-called ‘private’ and the so-called ‘public’?

4. ‘*Practice*’ issues and stories about concrete experiences and examples of our ongoing work should, of course, receive ample attention; what have been the ‘pragmatics’ of process, of ‘means and ends’, of ‘experience-reflection-action’ in participants’ AL, AR, PAR work? What stories and case studies and novel/innovative moments can we share and offer for further consideration? What have been contradictions-in-practice and how have they been dealt with in the concrete ‘situated context’ and what can be learned from this ‘beyond’ the concrete instance? Many AL, AR and PAR projects continuously touch upon issues of politics and policy; how have the connections been made and what have been the emerging issues?

Streams of Praxis

Simultaneously and in addition, through the formation of ‘applied streams’ of AL, AR and PAR, we intend to assist participants and presenters to focus their contributions onto the practicalities and concrete contexts through which our various approaches ‘become real’. As you will be able to see below, during the second and third days of the Congress – dedicated to looking at our ‘presents’ – we intend to share our understanding(s) of and experiences in the various fields in which we work, with the third day of proceedings occurring in venues ‘typical’ of the respective fields in which AL, AR, PAR ‘occur’.

Whilst ‘fields’ may be defined in various ways, we have opted for a pragmatic approach and have invited local practitioners to initiate and develop ‘stream organising clusters’, both to connect with the international networks of practitioners operating in these fields, to seek sponsorships (possibly to invite keynote speakers for their stream) and, importantly, to help organise a program specifically for the third day and their specific stream, including organising an appropriate venue. Another document is sent with this program announcement, outlining tasks and roles and other details useful for the organising of this third day of the Congress.

At present, we have the beginnings of an AL, AR and PAR and the ‘*ecology*’ stream; and ‘*education*’ stream is forming; there are several individuals interested in *community development* and *international development*; ‘*welfare and health*’ is another stream evolving; ‘*systems*’ and AL, AR and PAR has strong interest from a group of members of ANZsys and there are individuals interested in an ‘*Indigenous Peoples*’ stream.

We encourage everyone interested in becoming involved in a ‘stream’ to get in touch with us and we will pass your details on to others so you can start working towards your ‘very own’ program. At regular time intervals we will gather representatives of the ‘streams’ in Melbourne so as to harmonise and assist with the details of the organisation of the third Congress day!

Congress Program: the overall flow of conversations.

The above thematic specifications and the various opportunities for presentations, workshops, poster sessions and plenaries will then be ‘inserted’ in the following overall ‘flow’ we have designed for the Congress.

DAY 1: Whose (and what) shoulders are we standing on?

The origins of AL, AR, PAR. What are our legacies, our sources, historical, philosophical, practical, both in general and in specific areas of application? Listening to and conversing about the foundations of the various participatory and action-based approaches to learning, researching, social change, organisational change,

community and international development, welfare and health, the ecology, certain groups of people, etc. What can and should newer and younger practitioners still learn from the elders in our various movements how can be maintain and emulate the spirit of those who were then brave enough to try and make a difference... and did with vigour and much effect!

DAYS 2 & 3: Our present(s)

Where are we at today with AL, AR, PAR? The 'States of the Arts' and how are we all contributing to and learning from today's stories...? Two days of presenting and examining and reflecting on the present state(s) of play(s) with the second of those days organised by and spent in a location 'typical' or 'representative' of one of the several 'streams' of application of PAR, AL, process/systems/organisational development/international and community development, etc.

Whilst the first of these two days would offer opportunities for plenary and panel presentations, workshops and inspired conversations and exchanges, on the second day, Congress participants will meet in various venues across the metropolitan area of Melbourne and home to institutions, organisations or agencies active in a particular field of application of PAR, AR, AL. These 'field-days' will be organised by local groups and networks active in the particular 'applied' field and will consist of plenary and workshop presentations, demonstrations, posters, whatever seems relevant and expressive of the particular directions PAR, AR and AL take in the respective field(s). A huge opportunity to learn and develop our skills reciprocally...!

DAY 4: Prefiguring:

How to grow and evolve PAR, AL and AR in the hazardous times we inhabit? We reflect about and explore questions of the next steps we should best take in the immediate future environments we co-create. How can we deliberately include up-and-coming generations of new practitioners and researchers and stay in conversation with 'older' generations? How to further develop the various approaches participants have shared during the previous three days and how to take them into our own 'habitats'? Exploring the newly emerging 'eco' environments and what we imagine the massive anticipated upheavals will 'do' to issues like social and global justice, social and ecological sustainability, 'new/old' forms and modalities of survival, micro- and macro-systems of (re-)production – from individuals, via families and communities to systems of 'secondary sociality': business and work/labour, education, health, recreation, etc. And, finally, we would do best to not forget that the struggle with the established positivist paradigm and its supporters and beneficiaries is not over yet...

Preliminary Call for Abstracts

We are now launching a ***Preliminary Call for Abstracts*** for Papers, Workshop proposals, proposals for Poster sessions and discussions rounds, ***especially for those who need to apply for leave and for other support from their respective institutions***. A further call for papers etc will go out in February, together with a more fulsome program, registration material and other information, early bird opportunities etc.

The Organising Committee will receive abstracts for proposed refereed contributions (up to 300-400 words) from interested individuals and groups till ***April 29th 2010***. Please email to alara@borderlands.org.au with 'ALARA Congress' in the subject line; or contact us on 61 – (0)3 – 9819 3239.

We will let intending participants know about the acceptance of refereed papers by ***June 1st 2010*** but those who need earlier confirmation about the acceptance or otherwise of their proposal should indicate this in an accompanying email/letter and we will do our very best to speed up the refereeing process as necessary.

As per usual in a participatory discursive context, we would like to minimise one-way lecturing communication, leaving space for plenary talks/panels but also spending more time in discussion, conversation, etc. in more practice-based, issue-focused or context specific streams. But we will also create spaces for the presentation of formal papers, poster sessions and discussion groups.

The ALARA website - www.alara.net.au/2010OrganisingCongress - will be regularly updated as to developments in the AR, AL and PAR 'streams' and the more general thematic developments as well as key-note and other presenters as they can be confirmed.

Venue

The Congress will be held at *Bayview Eden*, built around a beautiful late-1800s mansion, looking over Albert Park all the way to Port Phillip Bay. The venue has many woody welcoming 'spaces' for the main events, breakout rooms and places to sit and 'be' and converse. Catering and restaurants are on site, as well as a hotel for those who wish to stay at the venue. Situated at 6 Queens Road, Melbourne, it is less than 10 minutes tram from the city centre, surrounded by parkland and seems perfect for the World Congress next year...