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Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing
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Editorial

The Bulletin: Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing

Mary McAteer Edge Hill University, CARN CG member

Editing an anthology of academic papers is always a privilege. In this case, it is also a pleasure, and allows me the opportunity to feel more connected to the conference I convened, but had to miss attending due to family circumstances. Reading the papers contained in this bulletin allows me to feel in some way connected to CARN 2018 in both a personal and an academic sense.

Many decisions are involved in the planning of a conference; this one was no different. In CARN, three key elements fed into our decision-making. Firstly, 2018 marked 100 years of (partial) suffrage for women; for this reason we chose our conference theme ‘Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing’ and chose a keynote panel representing women’s voices in action research. Secondly, choosing Manchester, and specifically, Friends’ Meeting House for our conference gathering underlined the significance of these locations in relation to human rights, and in particular, women’s rights, given the city’s strong social and political history of activism; it was the birthplace of Emmeline Pankhurst’s Women’s Social and Political Union. Locating ourselves in Manchester allowed us to take advantage of the historic setting, by building in some local events which resonated well with our conference themes. The Peace Walk was particularly appreciated by participants. The choice of Friends’ Meeting House for the conference venue, given the long history of Quaker activism for the voiceless resonated strongly with the value-base of CARN, and the aims of the 2018 conference. Finally, Edge Hill University, whose colours are those of the suffragette movement, hosted the conference for the first time.

As I was unable to welcome participants in person to the conference, I now take the opportunity to welcome you all warmly to this CARN Bulletin. Reading and reflecting on the papers, and the abstracts submitted for presentation at the conference, it is evident that the conference theme provoked diverse and creative responses, and drew together work from across the globe. We were joined by colleagues from 19 countries (with others connecting on social media), including representation from our sister networks the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) and Network of Educational Action Researchers in Ireland (NEARI).

As has become customary at a CARN conference, we opened with a shared ARNA-CARN event, “The ARNA-CARN Dialogues: Achievements and Challenges in Democratizing Knowledge Production”. This was hosted by Lonnie Rowell and Joe Shosh as part of the follow-up conversations from the June 2017 First Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy, held in Cartagena, Colombia.

This issue of the CARN Bulletin brings together the five keynote presentations, five conference papers and five reflections from the 2018 Conference, held in the Friends Meeting House, Manchester. The conference opened with five provocations, provided by a panel of international action researchers, working in different contexts. We thank them warmly for their willingness to be part of our deliberations, and sharing this space and time with us. Based loosely around the theme of Unwelcome
Truths, each provocation lasted approximately 12 minutes, and finished with thought-provoking, critical questions. These provocations and questions helped shape the discussions in breakout groups throughout the conference and over coffee breaks which were never long enough!

Keynote Provocations
The first section of the Bulletin presents the text of the five keynote provocations; we are grateful to all for the ways in which they helped frame dialogue and discussion throughout the conference.

Margaret Ledwith, known particularly for her work in community development, began by reminding us that participatory action research is, in and of itself, a political activity. Reflecting on Manchester’s radical social history, and tradition of speaking truth to power, she urges us to go beneath the surface of the issues and problems we address so that in challenging underlying injustices, we may become part of the solution, rather than the problem. She describes the current political climate as one which dehumanises and exploits people, and privileges profit and greed over human wellbeing, asking how we can claim to practice participatory action research without ‘contextualising that practice firmly in the political times which shape people’s life experiences?’

Coming from the perspective of a mental health practitioner, Sally Hardy draws on her work with ‘lesser heard’, or ‘undeserved communities’. She explores the concept of full inclusion when working with groups of vulnerable and disenfranchised people, challenging ‘Public and Patient Involvement’ when it is reduced to a ‘tag on’ process, rather than a fully participatory one. In participatory action research, which focus on power differential, she finds the possibility of engagement on a meaningful level.

Helen Newall asked us: “why shouldn’t we take the arts out of state funded education: they could happen in extra-curricular time, couldn’t they?’ As a professor of Theatre Praxis, she describes her methodology as Practice-as-Research, which is in her words, ‘akin to action research, and it has been similarly dismissed by the ‘real’ scholars and researchers.’ She explores the relationship between the process and products of art, suggesting that while the public experiences the product of the art/production/performance, the artist has a deep and personal relationship with the process, engaging in a personal and intimate struggle which remains invisible and therefore insignificant to the public. She exhorts us to value the processes of art and the arts and the knowledges embedded therein. ‘Consider [this] a call for recognition of the knowledges embedded in process; for messing about; for colour; for glitter and glue; for singing; for paint; for improvisation; for the value of the ephemeral experience; the thinking in action; in doing; in making.’

Collaborative Action Research presents us with many challenges, including the ‘ups and downs’ brought about by engaging in critical friendship. Jacqueline van Swet shares her experiences of learning to be, and teaching how to be, a good critical friend. She argues, that like many forms of arts and crafts, learning to be a critical friend takes many ‘flight hours’, suggesting that a conference, such as CARN, can provide many opportunities for using and learning from the shared social capital of the participants. She asks us to reflect on this during and after the conference, asking
‘How can we deal with the ups and downs of critical friendship during this CARN conference? And why would we?’

**Karin Rönnerman** reminds us that action research is about research, as well as action. Often seen as a practice-based approach in schools and other settings, the focus can become the actions, without sufficient exploration of the understandings generated by the research. Thus, it can become mechanistic, and lack critical engagement. When done with deep understanding, and with collaboration, she suggests that there is the potential for sustainable future improvements. Leaders who undertake action research, and themselves engage in professional learning, are therefore best positioned to support the development of practice ecologies, where teachers learn from each other and make meaning in their contexts.

Our five keynote panel members provided rich stimuli for deliberation and reflection that were revisited throughout the conference, and in doing so, challenged us all to see below the surface. They exhorted us to explore meaning, processes as well as products, and question, critique and challenge dominant narratives which reduce the possibilities of action research, and furthermore, reduce our humanity.

**Conference Papers**
The second section of this Bulletin presents five further papers reflecting a snapshot of the diversity of the conference.

**Angela Gallagher-Brett** and **Christine Lechner**’s paper “Enhancing language teaching through Action Research Communities for Language Teachers” reports on their work as part of the international collaborative project ‘Action Research Communities for Language Teachers’. A clearly articulated element of their work is the extent to which collaboration, critical friendship, and shared reflections all contribute to both the development of teaching practices, and also to supporting teachers in undertaking action research projects in their own classrooms.

The ethics of research practice continues to trouble us as we work in highly complex and contextualised ways. UK based early career researchers **Lou Mycroft** and **Kay Sidebottom** ask what issues arise as we work in new, ‘posthuman’ ways. They describe their PhD journeys as nomadic (methodologically and ethically), personally de-centering, and explored through multiple, eclectic lenses; a process of both what they are ceasing to be, and what they are becoming. Ethical practice(?) is thus ‘the daily walking of boundaries’, as part of a slow ontology which embraces different rhythms of inquiry.

**Lydia Arnold** and **Lin Norton**’s paper, “A critical discussion of the role of pedagogical action research (PedAR) in academic staff development” reflects on their work to support colleagues in their own pedagogical action research in Higher Education in the UK. They find that when action research is undertaken as part of assessed programmes, there is a tendency for the process to be rushed, lacking in deep reflection, and thus can be performative, rather than transformational in nature. They suggest that alternative assessment strategies might enable the uncovering, and sharing of uncomfortable truths that, through challenge and critique, may provide the stimuli to transform practice. Is it possible, they ask, that the hijacking of pedagogical action research can be overturned, and its territory reclaimed?
Michelle Moore and Emma Wheatley’s “Exploration into the Effectiveness of the Parental Tool ‘Let’s Talk’ Book, in Supporting Parents to Develop Emotional Language” discusses the centrality of emotional literacy in child development in Ireland. Their work suggests the importance of supporting parents, in their own home, in the use of strategies to develop general and emotional vocabularies. Parents reported a greater emotional literacy in their children, and improved communications within their families. The authors hope that feedback from the evaluation can also be used to feed forward into future programme and resource development.

The last paper in this section, “Diversity, recognition and dialogue: The voices of books and readers-listeners in the Intercultural Human Library”, from Vinicius Ramos and Ana Maria Silva presents their collaborative work to challenge discrimination and prejudice towards migrants in Braga, Portugal. Through the story of an immigrant, their exploration of interculturality challenges us by suggesting that someone who tolerates, does not celebrate; interculturality should be a celebration. Through their use of a Human Library, they enabled participants to talk to people they might not normally have done, and in so doing, open themselves to a range of perspectives, emotions and experiences that they found enriching. For the authors, this helped reduce prejudice between ‘different’ backgrounds and perspectives. In essence, they were opened up to mutual recognition, and the possibility of celebratory interculturality.

Conference Reflections
The final section of this Bulletin expresses the conference theme, Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing, from the perspective of participant reflections. Five reflections are presented, which helpfully frame the ways in which a CARN conference provides place and space, time and permission to think and re-think our academic lives. We thank all those who took time to provide such rich reflections.

Our friends and colleagues, Caítronia, Mary, Bernie and Máirín at NEARI were particularly grateful for discussions which enabled them to re-frame the concept ‘critical friend’ as ‘constructive friend’, and for the ‘bonus’ of the peace walk to the scene of the Peterlee Massacre (1819). This resonates with Margaret Ledwith’s keynote address, emphasising the political significance of our location, as well as our practice.

Colette Saunders found the conference a mini-adventure, allowing her to break out of her hitherto lonely research journey, and connect with colleagues from across the world. As a trade union activist, her induction to action research represented a methodological match, and the conversations she had with colleagues from EARI and CARN made her feel ‘anchored’, and motivated.

Again in Jeffrey Radloff’s reflections, we are reminded of the importance of context as we bring our unique worldviews and identities to our research. Further, the challenge, and benefits of collaborative research which can force researchers to completely change perspectives or approaches were evident throughout, he felt.

Mohd Mat Noor reflects on his third CARN conference, the first one at which he has presented his work. The opportunity to meet with, talk to, and receive feedback from
a diverse range of people is something that enhances his work, and provides the opportunity to build networks.

Our final reflection from Sumana Sen Mandala reflects on her experience of teaching Bharata-Natyam, with the realisation that she has been an unconscious collaborative action researcher. Her experiences at the conference helped her explore ways in which teaching dance can be an act of social justice.

About CARN as a network
CARN operates as a network; this has always been a central tenet of our work. It embodies a fundamental way of being that we often refer to as the ‘spirit of CARN’. This spirit manifests in many and varied ways. In particular, the ways in which we work together, to voice our values, to dare and to do have produced the conditions in which we can explore the potential for human (collective) flourishing in an increasingly individualised world. The ways in which action research enables us to theorise our practice in context becomes a form of collective moral consciousness, which leads us to do “the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 141). Our work is thus ‘historically located, [and] culturally embedded’ (Carr, 1986: 183)

The Conference
The organisation of an international conference, one which enables us to ‘keep the conversation going’ (Carr, 1986), requires much work and cooperation. A brief overview of presenters shows the range and scope of the conference, and serves to underline the work that goes on in the background.

- 19 countries represented, including US, Canada, Thailand, Japan and India, and pleasingly, all four countries within the UK,
- Papers reflected diverse contexts, including issues in action research in health, schools, and community activism
- Presenting practitioners included teachers, academics, students, activists and community members involved in their own local projects
- Representations from our local universities, including Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Manchester, University of Cumbria and Liverpool Hope University
- Colleagues from my own university, Edge Hill, presented 10 papers in a range of topics
- It was perhaps the inclusion of ‘Daring and Doing’ in the conference title, which led to creative formats including video, dance, art.

Acknowledgements
As convenor of this conference, I am extremely grateful for the support of colleagues from the CARN Coordinating Group, and in particular Andy Convery for his assistance in all things budgetary, and Ruth Balogh, for her support in opening the conference and generally overseeing things in my absence. Charlotte Hastings and Julie Kirby, colleagues from the Faculty of Education research office, worked tirelessly from the first queries about proposals to the final reconciliation of the financial records; their help and meticulous attention to detail is very much appreciated. Their comment that ‘everyone was so friendly and flexible to work with’, is perhaps a fitting tribute to the ‘spirit of CARN’.

Finally, thanks from all the coordinating group and especially from myself, go to the CARN secretary, Charmian Wilby. As ever, her organisation and preparation, her willingness to undertake ‘whatever was needed’, have helped ensure that the conference experience was the best it could be for all our participants. As Editor of this Bulletin, I also add my thanks for her hard work as Editorial Assistant, and to Charlotte Hastings, for her work as Assistant Editor.

**References**


KEYNOTE PROVOCATIONS

Participatory Action Research is a political activity!

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Welcome everyone!

My provocation, and firm belief, is that participatory action research is, inevitably, a political activity!

Let me start with a story of Manchester’s radical heritage. Its tradition of radical thought and action erupted from where we are today to change the world. Manchester has a long tradition of speaking unwelcome truths to power, of standing up against injustice to demand a better future for all. I feel it is important to be aware of our collective inheritance, the way we’ve benefited from the ideas and action that have taken seed in the past. It still has much to teach us in today’s troubled times. My story begins with the role Quakers played in anti-slavery action, most particularly Quaker women’s courage in the early 1800s, driven by the belief that it is a social responsibility to speak truth to power. Not far from here, a much lesser-known story of daring and doing changed the world. In 1862, Lancashire was the centre of the world’s textile industry, making mill owners extremely rich. But, it was the poor cotton spinners and weavers who risked starvation, rising up in solidarity, refusing to work with raw cotton picked by Black slaves in USA. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln wrote to the millworkers thanking them for the role they played in ending slavery. Five minutes walk from here is a statue of Abraham Lincoln inscribed with his praise for their courage. Yet few people know and celebrate this.

On 16th August 1819, very near to this Quaker Meeting House, a peaceful, pro-democracy rally of 60,000–80,000 women/children/men gathered. The cavalry charged into them, deliberately killing 15 people and injuring 400–700. This became known as the Peterloo Massacre. Mike Leigh, film director, who grew up near here, has just released the film Peterloo as a tribute to Manchester people’s bravery on that day. And, a campaign for the Peterloo Massacre to be taught in schools has been launched to help children to understand their common inheritance.

Peterloo made a difference to democracy. It triggered movements for the right to vote, like Chartism, concentrating on men’s rights to vote, and the Suffragette movement for women’s voting rights. In 1903, the Suffragette Movement was started by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters from their home in Manchester. In fact, the Women’s Social and Political Union was founded in their front room! And in 1987, The Pankhurst Centre was opened as a women-only, educational space. I have visited that front parlour to honour my debts, the difference their action in history has made to my life as a woman today!

Friedrich Engels, aged only 24, wrote The Condition of the Working Class in England based on his distress at seeing people’s suffering in poverty in Manchester. This led
him to propose his ideas for communism to Karl Marx when they met in Chetham's Library, in Manchester city centre. Today, Engels’ statue stands outside Home, the arts centre where Mike Leigh’s film Peterloo was premiered last week, with a Manchester bee, Manchester’s symbol of solidarity and community.

At this point, I want to emphasise the centrality of praxis - theory and action intertwined - as the only effective basis of action for social change. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, developed his critical praxis from experience as he listened to Gramsci expressed in the stories of the people in the favelas. This is theory in action, not as theory as abstract thought.

Paulo Freire listening to people’s stories in the favelas

In turn, as a grassroots community worker, I listened to Freire on the streets of Manchester. It was epiphanic for me, hearing power expressed in people’s everyday stories. It opened my mind to the way that dominant power is woven into the structures of society, and the answers are right there in the stories of the people! All around us! In the 1970s and 1980s, Freire’s critical praxis influenced participatory action research and community development to have a radical intention, to bring about transformative social change based on values of human dignity and mutual respect. This is the reason that participatory action research found me in my Manchester years: it was the only approach to research that fitted with community development’s principles and values, a profound commitment to social and environmental justice with action for change at its heart.

In these ways, Paulo Freire gave me the foundation for building theory/practice relevant for my own cultural/political context – to develop theory in action, theory as practice, not as abstract thought. In today’s troubled times, Freire is as relevant as ever, and Freire Institutes are playing a vital role in action for social and environmental justice in many countries of the world.

One of the most important additions to my Freirean, feminist, anti-racist praxis was down to Paula, my friend and colleague for many years before her premature death, who was a founder member of Abasindi Black Women’s Cooperative in Moss Side, Manchester. She taught me with tough, often excruciating love to have the courage to go deeper into the shocking nature of white privilege, an assumed, unearned
advantage in life. White people’s reluctance to hear unwelcome truths spoken to our assumed entitlement to our white power is an enormous problem in today’s world.

What I have learned from these stories of daring and doing, speaking unwelcome truths to power, is that:

- Local practice taken out of its political context can never do anything more than...
- scratch at the surface symptoms of injustice.
- In making the political personal, it is in danger of laying blame and responsibility at the feet of victims of injustice because...
- it fails to reach under the surface deep enough to identify the political roots of structural discrimination – forces that shape the lived reality of people to create the unacceptable social inequalities we witness today.

Profit is the mantra of free-trade neoliberalism. It has created world crises of social and environmental justice by elevating profit generation over human wellbeing and a healthy planet. It is a political ideology that dehumanises and exploits people and planet, working counter to our principles and practice. The situation is worsening with an uprising of far-right politics, informed by misogyny, xenophobia and a fast-moving, angry and divisive politics of Whiteness. By situating ourselves on the surface, we are in danger of becoming part of the problem rather than the solution, overlooking unacceptable contradictions that normalise social divisions to the point of invisibility. For example, the UK is the 5th richest country in the world, yet the most socially divided in Europe – this is surely a living contradiction that strikes the chords of dissonance! We need to open our eyes and see what power looks like. Who has it and who does not, and why? How do its structures and systems work to privilege some and disadvantage others? These questions need to be analysed in order to deconstruct the forces of power that create inequality, at the same time as constructing a counternarrative of change based on values of cooperation not competition, compassion not blame, kindness and caring, a counternarrative of belonging to
replace the narrative of individualism and greed that has done so much damage to people and the planet in our times.

Thank you for listening to my provocation, and let me leave you with this thought-provoking question:

How can we claim to practice participatory action research, with its commitment to social and environmental justice, without contextualising that practice firmly in the political times which shape people’s life experiences?
Stakeholder Inclusion using Action Research approaches: Truth or Tokenism?

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Introduction
This paper will aim to cover aspects of my work as a mental health practitioner, educator and researcher. I have always leaned towards working within areas of what is now being called ‘lesser heard’, or ‘underserved communities’, aiming to incorporate their voice into what has been traditionally a medically dominated discourse of research, clinical practice and education (Wilson et al 2007; Postle, et al, 2008).

My introduction to mental health practice was through working at some of the large isolated institutions where the psychiatric (now referred to in England as ‘mental health’) units were deliberately placed outside and away from the local community (White, 1986). Set amongst a backdrop of urban life, madness was deliberately kept separate from everyday life’s harsh realities. Today, most of these asylum institutions are either being re-generated into prime real-estate, or converted into smaller units identified as places of safety, or crisis houses. Most often these are, yet again, attempting to remove the person from their familiar surroundings and daily stimulus (Stulz, et al, 2018). During my doctoral study, I sought out people's understanding and experiences of ‘modern madness’, to find that contemporary services were still being created and organised around the professionals understanding, lives and preferences. Little has changed. But more of that later.

Engaging with long term and chronic mental illness has taught me a great deal about inclusion, engagement and active participation. What it means to attempt to gain informed consent to participate with someone who is running around the ward in just a bed sheet – asking them repeatedly if they understood their human rights, or what being being detained under the mental health act actually meant. Or sitting alongside someone in silence, seeking their agreement to the next phase of treatment, when all they want is to literally die.

What does it feel like to be isolated and ignored? Trapped or incarcerated in a hidden suffering that few understand or wish to get close to understanding, to be alongside that person, during times of duress and distress? Will anyone listen, or hear what our stakeholders have to say about how they are being treated, educated, housed? Can we tolerate to hear stories of exploitation, manipulation and coercion?

Against this backdrop of a clinical experience in mental health care services, I entered nurse education, with a personal dream to make a difference to people’s lives, hoping I could but somehow influence service redesign through research and gain evidence to raise the profile of those who remain ‘lesser heard’.
My goal, in this paper, is to consider some of the lessons I have learned along the way, in terms of whether and at what level can engagement through stakeholder inclusion be achieved.

If we look at how far progress has been made, when looking back to a time of women’s suffrage, emancipation, and then onto the social movement arising from the AIDS epidemic. Through a dichotomy that is both political activism and acts of terrorism, society continues to ‘other’, segregate and dismiss vast sways of our richly diverse communities we encounter in our working and personal lives (cf. Devi, 2018).

I first encountered participatory action research as a methodology for achieving transformation and sustainable change projects during my time at the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) London; working with the research institute and practice development teams. I was engaged as a researcher to gather feedback data on notions of nursing practice expertise. I will use examples of the work I have attempted along the way, to share the highs and lows of inclusion, collaboration and active participation, with broad and diverse stakeholder groups.

**Who are our stakeholders?**

For me, a stakeholder is anyone who has an interest, (or stake) in a situation, problem or issue. Using such a broad term captures potential for obtaining thoughts opinions and experiences of all aspects of society.

An advantage of stakeholder engagement is the potential and possibilities this brings in expanding and extending the knowledge base (Hart, 2007). This can open up potential for longer term sustainability, as well as practical implementation strategies achieved during a changing process.

Early participation in any project is vital. The issues of sustaining participation over time is and can be highly problematic. I have learnt to anticipate the time required to initiate an effective working relationship with stakeholders; to agree their level of participation, accepting that this may vary during a project’s more specific timelines. And then to move towards forming any reasonable adjustments required to enable that level of flexibility to adapt and overcome all of the ‘surprises’ that can arise when working alongside and with either vulnerable, or disenfranchised groups of people.

For a long time, academics and social reformers have been struggling to differentiate the notions of participation with power structures. Inevitably, discourse comes back to power. My doctoral thesis considered power within a discourse of madness and how our language becomes a means to influence and reaffirm power structures. For example, reading back some of my early interviews with people willingly talking to me about their experiences of madness. I realised how arrogant I could be, given the research role of making interpretations of their personal story in how I used any follow-up or clarification questions as the interviewer. Thankfully, my research supervisor knocked sense into me, as we deconstructed and reconstructed narrative accounts within the context of the emerging research thesis.

This led me to a growing interest in patient and public involvement in research as marker of good, ethical practice. Today, funders expect early participation, yet, more often than not, we can regularly see how the Public and Patient Involvement (PPI)
element of research is still considered to be merely a ‘tag on’; something that has to
be done rather than something that is a central element of activity working towards
strengthening the research approach and also in evidencing the ethos of the
researcher.

Yet, working within action research methodologies, and in particular participatory
research, there is a glimmer of hope to achieve engagement on a meaningful level.

**Stakeholder literature**

When considering the historical developments of stakeholder engagement and
inclusion, it can be seen (from this very basic literature search carried out in
preparation for this talk) that there has been an exponential growth in published
papers considering the value of phrases such as ; stakeholder engagement, stakeholder
communication, stakeholder management etc…

**Graph 1: Ebscohost Search outputs (18/9/2018): Stakeholder literature**

However, when you drill down to consider the number of papers that equate
stakeholder engagement with political activism and social change, the numbers begin
to dwindle.

**Graph 2: Ebscohost Search outputs (18/9/2018): Political activism**

So why is this?
We cannot ignore the issue of stakeholder inclusion when seeking to make a difference. What is required is to become innovative and creative in our methodologies to accommodate, adapt and adjust to the levels of engagement stakeholders require, and what is needed to achieve engagement from their perspective, not ours.

For me, creative arts offer a bridge forming across a chasm of power seen between the researcher and the researched; the patient and their health or social care practitioner or the educator and their students.

Image 1: Banksy¹ – power struggle

“*If we wash our hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless we side with the powerful – we do not remain neutral*”

Participatory research and action research share some common assumptions, but they are also seen as different in particular areas (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Heron & Reason, 1994).

For example, participatory research focuses on power differentials - such as culture and class conflicts. It has been most associated with ’grass-roots’ movements for promoting social change, whereas Action Research tends to try to minimize any power differences, avoiding areas of conflict, rather encouraging alignment through consensus and agreement - smoothing out any of the rough edges of controversy or disagreement (Brown & Tandon, 1983).

Indeed, the issue of power and challenging authority is central to this discussion as a distinguishing feature of the two approaches.

Participatory research recognizes the challenges inherent in doing work where the powerful in society may begin to resist change, particularly when they feel or

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¹ Banksy is a street artist and satirist who has captured the imagination and subverted the hierarchy of the art world. Yet, through his worldwide success he has been critised for joining the elite inner circle in the artworld. However, he attempts to remain an outsider largely by withholding his identity (Gough, 2012).
recognise where their power based is being threatened (Borkman & Schubert, 1994; Yeich & Levine, 1994). I have seen examples of this in places like Governmental bodies – aiming to engage ‘service user champions, or advocates’ yet unable to contain the level of disruption this can cause and working to then minimise potential impact for change when that change is seen to be going a bit too far, too quickly for the big bureaucracy to cope with a destabilisation of the status quo.

I attempted to achieve this, not quite at this level, when reporting on a peer support project that had been undertaken using integrative evaluation strategies (Hardy et al, 2013). The project’s lead researcher was a peer to those participants being interviewed, and again to those attending a focus group. They lead the project, aiming to capture opinions and experiences of an innovative community support group, gathering input from participants and their peer group facilitators, and the project commissioners.

When seeking to write the project up for an academic publication, it was rejected several times, with reviewer comments such as – I don’t know enough about the demographics of participants so cannot make a judgement. I thought how arrogant; the aim was to allow the dialogue to stand out, not to focus on making a validity judgement on who was saying it, based on their demographic status.

The intention was that the focus of the main content was about profiling and foregrounding the participants voice as the central data source; aiming to capture the themes and issues emergent through what participants had to say about their engagement with peer support groups in their local community. My attempt to avoid readers pre-judging, or coming at the paper with any risk of unconscious bias towards the study participants had potentially backfired.

The quotation below is taken from a book that explores the ‘art of the asylum’, where an image can speak more than a thousand words, in terms of addressing, tackling and raising a way of communicating the sensitive, taboo or difficult issues that is more often altered to become comfortable or romanticised.

_For these curiously crude objects and images contained within themselves an astonishing intensity and a latent power to work changes on the milieu into which they had been imported;_ (McGregor, 1989: 3)

So how do we go about social change through stakeholder inclusion? Is it possible through a systematic rigorous process, such as participatory based research approaches, or are we at risk of whitewashing away all the nuances and cultural references when working with and across diverse stakeholder groups? Is there a rigorous process that allows inclusion to be attained by adhering to what is expected?

Noorani (2013) writes about service users (i.e health care patients or consumers) as stakeholders and how this can be considered through models of authority, particularly when considering their place as social activists

Max Weber (1958) distinguishes three types of authority: _Traditional authority_, _Rational-legal authority_ and _Charismatic authority_.

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**Traditional authority**
Which is an established belief that traditionally it is the leaders who have a traditional and legitimate right to exercise their authority, further legitimizing their position in society.

This traditional authority gives rise to patrimonial systems like patriarchal and feudalistic systems as a means to assert control and command within societies.

These systems are however dependent upon the followers' acceptance of this authority, and that the followers continue to see this type of authority as legitimate. There is an element of trust involved, that leaders are and will behave like leaders.

I see this a lot in research teams, where the professor is and often has the final say in how things are to be done, in the department, or in the project, in terms of what choice of method is undertaken and an expectation of how the research team then behaves and interacts with external stakeholders. All done with reverence and control and an intention for achieving good outcomes.

**Rational-legal authority**
This type of authority rests on the belief in the "legality" of formal rules and hierarchies, and in the right of those elevated in the hierarchy to possess authority and issue commands.

This type of authority is often seen as legitimate in bureaucratic systems, which enables impersonal, specific and formal structures of modern companies. People will hence find this type of authority legitimate, as authority that is distributed to leaders based on their rationality and associated capability.

This can be seen in the person who signs off the funding application. The person who represents the funders. When recently doing some work with a charitable organization, and refreshingly, they said they liked our team as we didn’t represent the usual suspects who dominate the field and who they know will do a good job, but will inevitably come up with very safe and similar outcomes. This organization was keen to hear from new research teams that brought an alternative perspective to the table, from a variety of stakeholder perspectives brought together in the proposing research team’s profiles.

**Charismatic authority**
This type of authority rests on the belief in an exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual.

Charismatic leaders are often seen as legitimate in times of crisis or change when extraordinary leadership is called for, and when this extraordinary leadership is recognized in the specific authorial figure by followers.

According to Weber, only the traditional and rational-legal types of authority relationships are stable enough to provide permanent structures such as those seen in many business-driven organizations. Structures formed on charismatic authority, are considered then as short lived, and need to most likely and inevitably evolve into more traditional - stable forms of authority. They are keeping the status quo.
Although in a postmodern world, such distinctive lines of authority (as outlined in these Weberian three levels) are more difficult to categorise. Today in such a postmodern society, much academic thinking, in terms of what is experienced in complex bureaucratic organisations, is useful and particularly pertinent when we begin to want to engage stakeholders as equal partners and co-participants.

Yet, authority is not always unwanted. Rather, authority exists and endures in a world where there are power differentials amongst society. Within the health care sector, authority is freely given when there is advanced or specialist knowledge of some kind provided by someone, who has the right job title. So, for example prescriptive authority is premised on the authority figure having access to elements that go beyond the specific knowledge of a given subject; someone in turn has to grant that authority, achieved by merely accepting the prescriptive advice being given. The status quo gets shaken when someone dares to challenge or reject that prescriptive advice.

Having a level of understanding to where power and authority lies, can help us help others navigate culturally sensitive traditional claims of authority. Then we can open up discussion around a need to decide whether that authority - at a particular moment in time - is suitable for their context and circumstances (Blencowe, 2013; Dawney, 2013).

Building on Wolfenberger’s (1980; 1982) theoretical underpinnings of modern social reform and notions of community inclusion via normalisation came a ‘participation ladder’, which juxtaposes those considered powerless citizens with the powerful/authoritarians and in so doing highlights the fundamental divisions existing between them.

**Image 2: Eight rungs of the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969)**

![Ladder of Participation](image)

A justification for using such a simplistic abstraction is the assumption that those considered as the ‘have-nots’, perceive the powerful as a ‘monolithic system’ who in turn view the have-nots as a faceless sea of ‘other’, which raises prejudicial assumptions that there exists very little comprehension of any similarities and or the value of considering the differences between them.
It should be noted that the typology itself does not include any analysis of significant roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation. But, it was a useful tool in its time for considering different consequences to engagement approaches, and the consequences of when power differential are not being considered or addressed. These roadblocks lie on both sides of a dichotomous fence.

Furthermore, some of the characteristics used to illustrate each of the eight ‘types’ might be applicable to other rungs. For example, employment of the have-nots in a program or on a planning staff could occur at any of the eight rungs and could represent either a legitimate or illegitimate characteristic of citizen participation. Depending on their motives, power holders can hire people to co-opt them, placate them, or to merely utilize the have-nots' special skills and insights. For example, some political manoeuvres might involve boasting about a citizen engagement strategy, whereas in reality such positive discrimination recruitment can be used to ameliorate a level of consensus, whilst at the same time destroying any credibility within their original community structures.

**What can Action Research offer stakeholder engagement as active participation?**

Action Research (AR) was introduced in North America over 70 years ago by Lewin (1946), who suggested that the best way to learn about social systems was to try to change them.

Lewin proposed cycles of problem definition, fact finding, goal setting, action, and evaluation to simultaneously solve problems and generate new knowledge. Thus, one important characteristic of action research is to organize research into different phases, with findings informing action, repeated in cycles throughout the project process.

Also, AR aims to identify and involve key stakeholders at all stages of planning and implementation. Yet, this inclusion process is most often firmly controlled and led by the researcher.

Closely associated with organization development, action research has traditionally worked with human service staff and managers, but only more recently has AR become seen as a useful tool for engaging and working with service users across complex health and social care systems and structural reform programmes. However there remains potential for elements of manipulation and or coercion in any focus being on the successful outcomes, rather than on the impact potential upon those involved. This realisation then led on to Participatory Action Research.

**Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

Nelson et al, (1998) describes PAR as a form of applied research that represents a fundamentally different paradigm than conventional research (Chesler, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). PAR therefore, blends traditions of participatory research with action research.

Participatory research emerged from work with socially ‘oppressed’ groups in the developing countries (cf. Yeich, 1996). Freire (1970) and his colleagues from Latin America developed the widely influential concept of engaging individuals in the process of critical analysis and working collaboratively to organize their collective
actions towards making improvement to their knowledge, and therefore, their situations and circumstances through process of emancipation.

Participatory research works on the assumption that oppressed groups become fully engaged in the process of an investigation, at all stages of the process. They participate in developing research questions, designing research instruments, collecting information, and reflecting on the data in order to transform their understanding about the nature of the problem under investigation.

With its connections to social movements, participatory research has been defined by Hall, (1992): "as a way for researchers and oppressed people to join in solidarity to take collective action, both short and long term, for radical social change" (p. xiv).

From participatory research, power imbalances are recognised as existing and therefore there is an expressed need to engage with oppressed people as agents of their own change.

Drawing from action research, PAR recognizes the value of engaging stakeholders in the research process and of using their input as part of the research process, informing findings to further inform intervention decisions and aspects of change being addressed.

PAR involves a high degree of cooperation between researchers and stakeholders with constant feedback loops and a commitment to using the findings and to raising all participants' consciousness about the problem in its social context (Barnsley & Ellis, 1992; Chesler, 1991; Gaventa, 1993).

The desired process of participatory action research according to Stringer, (1996) is:

- democratic (enabling the participation of stakeholders)
- equitable (acknowledging people's equality of worth)
- liberating (providing freedom from oppressive conditions)
- life enhancing (enabling the expression of people's full human potential)

When working with the Practice Development team at the RCN London, I recognised early on how the commissioners of projects needed to understand that there was inevitably going to be an element of disruption (critical phases of change). If understood well, in terms of a necessary process of culture change, these were often precursors to improved relationships, and sustainable practice change.

Early disruption can be best managed and understood when the stakeholder voice has been heard, considered and incorporated early on in project developments. For example, one clinical ward team I worked with were adamant they needed all the patients washed during the early morning. The ward was a busy unit and staff were noticeably feeling frazzled, short tempered and angry with each other, particularly if the ‘washes’ had not been achieved by the time the afternoon shift arrived.

I was asked to go into the unit and work with the team, as they had experienced a couple of serious incidents that had left the team anxious and traumatised. The first thing I did was talk to some of the key stakeholders; those people who knew and
understood the unit, in other words the patients and their families. I asked about what they considered to be good about the team, and who were those people that helped them the most. Some of the patients mistook the catering staff as the nurses, merely because they were the people who spoke to them every day and brought their food to the bedside with a joke and some laughter. I then undertook some observations of daily practice, which included some of the staff in joining me to just sit and observe; noticing where, when and how staff interacted with patients and their families. This peer to peer feedback was powerful, in that it allowed staff to see how their behaviours impacted on the ward atmosphere (e.g. one nurse stood clicking their pen at the end of the bed whilst also talking over the patient. Then staff tending to use no more than a few words to the patients, instead of full sentences such as; ‘you in pain’, ‘want some water’, ‘back in a minute!’’. Patients struggling past the desk whilst the team sat head down, avoiding eye contact, so they could continue writing copious notes and staring at a computer screen.

Following the period of observation, surveying the patients and families views and opinions, we formulated a plan together as a team, in how to implement some changes that would relieve the pressures of routine care delivery, and become more family focused and person-centred.

So often I hear still today, at the close of a project, as an after-thought; ‘Oh! We had better do some evaluation and get some stakeholder opinion’. People are not keen to hear some of the truths about their behaviour and its impact on others, whom they are often there to serve, in their positions of authority; whether as a practitioner, educator, parent or partner.

**What have I learned about stakeholder inclusion?**

I think there is still a ladder of engagement and that a person can choose how much or how little they wish to engage. But, invariably they will want to share their experiences, so please, make the time to listen and hear what the seldom heard have to say.

Here are some lessons learned, of stakeholder engagement. First, is to ensure there is clarity of purpose. People’s stress will immediately reduce when they know what their contribution is to a situation. It is the same process for a research project.

Ask yourselves, and those you wish to engage with: What is the purpose of stakeholder engagement?

**A) Clarification of purpose**

1. Depending on the project purpose, identify who are your key stakeholder groups.

1 a) Consider what groups already exist that you can utilise (eg consumer groups, charity organizations) or which groups need to be developed. Where would you best be able to access these different groups? For example teenage kids might need to be accessed in different places (e.g. shopping mall, skate parks, clubs etc ) in comparison to school age children.

2. Identify the purpose of engaging the different stakeholder groups
3. Decide on the level of engagement expected from different groups. For example, people with experience of head injury, dementia, acute illness, may need to be targeted at particular times of the day that suit them, and for shorter periods of time.

**B) Process of initial engagement & accessibility**

4. Develop a range of strategies for engaging maximum number of different stakeholder groups and consider the consequences of each approach. For example, *broad sweep* approach might reach a maximum number, but might yield limited results from harder to reach groups. Other approaches might include considering *snowball* method of asking people to recommend others or *targeting* specific areas of expertise.

5. Recognise the need for different ways of approaching stakeholders to maximize their engagement. For example, some people prefer face to face contact, others prefer emails. How will you gain access to personal contact details of people and what are the ethical and privacy issues involved?

6. Be clear about the expectations of stakeholder engagement and offer clear explanations of what is expected of them. For example consider what tokenistic practices look and feel like, when is the right time to approach people to be involved in projects, what are some of the outcomes the stakeholders can expect from being involved.

7. Consider where and how to access stakeholders. For example, do you ask them to meet on your territory, or on theirs, or do you suggest mutual territory in an attempt to overcome any potential barriers to engaging stakeholders.

**C) Maintaining stakeholder engagement**

8. Develop clear and transparent means of communication between stakeholders and project team. What are the processes to be used for giving and receiving feedback?

9. Be aware of the use of language and avoid (health care) jargon which can be exclusive and paternalistic. Consider also what experiences the stakeholder is having in engaging with other stakeholder groups.

10. Recognise the need for allocating sufficient time and resources to stakeholder engagement. For example allowing people adequate time to air their views in meetings and consider group processes and facilitation and negotiation skills needed to manage large numbers of disparate groups working together. How will each stakeholder group be given equal time to have their say?

11. Develop a sound working relationship with stakeholders through considering a communication strategy that enables dealing with conflict, promotes transformational leadership, empowerment and inclusiveness.

12. Utilise creative methods and approaches to facilitate stakeholders working together. For example Haikus, creative arts and crafts, using materials at hand, artifacts, collage, mandalas, cameras, videotapes, music, picture cards etc.
13. Utilise what people bring with them, their uniqueness, different perspectives and challenges.

**D) Ending engagement**

14. Consideration needs to be given to how projects end and what process stakeholders have in the final writing up and dissemination of project findings.

15. Consider also what support and engagement stakeholders might like to continue as a result of being involved in the project.

16. Consider how you are going to thank and celebrate stakeholder’s achievements once the project has ended.

**Caveat**

This is merely a starting point to stakeholder engagement and does not need to be seen as an exclusive list. As you engage and work with stakeholders think again how this strategy can be improved. Perhaps you will have a project to report back on for the next CARN conference. I hope this paper has helped to inspire you to integrate stakeholder engagement within your daily practice.
References


I am an academic, but embedded in that term ‘academic’, there is my identity as a practitioner-researcher: I am a writer; a playwright; a photographer; an installation artist. My methodology is Practice-as-Research. It is akin to action research, and it has been similarly dismissed by the ‘real’ scholars and researchers.

PaR is defined and termed variously. You’ll encounter it as Practice-led; practice based. My preferred term is Practice-as-Research or PaR. It is an international phenomenon. And - oh Holy Grail - it is REF-able! The British Research Excellence Framework is the audit of research outputs across the HE sector for the purposes of distributing funding. Other countries do this, as you all undoubtedly know, but for the purposes of the British Research Excellence Framework, or REF, “research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared” (REF2014, online).

The British REF panels have welcomed research presented in all its usual forms; journal articles, monographs etc; but also in forms that reflect “the invention and generation of ideas,” which they deem to include “images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights”.

So there is no issue with practice being research. The problematic aspect of it has always been that PaR often deals with ephemeral artefacts: performances, choreographies, productions, installations, experiences, which for REF require documenting, but which, if you’re not careful, can be overwhelmed or replaced by their own documentation, which might be video, photography. See Philip Auslander, Peggy Phelan and Matthew Reason for further discussion. But in a nutshell, a video recording can never truly offer its spectator what it was like to be there at the live event. But unless it is documented, how can other researchers access an ephemeral practice that is research? How can it be testable by other artists? Is it testable at all?

In any case, ephemeral or material, art is ambiguous. And can it ever truly convey the full range of insights embedded within it that its artist might have had in making it? Roland Barthes has after all told us that the author is dead; and that when it is finished the artefact no longer belongs to its writer but becomes what its reader makes of it. This isn’t good for the dissemination of objective research insights via the artefact itself.

The lack of contextualisation around art is also problematic. A scientist would not offer an image of particles taken in the HADRON collider at CERN without explanation, nor would that scientist invite a viewer to make of this image what you will; scientists explain to us clearly and unambiguously what they have found and what they did to get to what they have found. Their process is visible, and evident for replication, testing, and falsifiability.

But as an artist myself, I admit that I make what I make to experience the process. I rarely end up as much in love with the products as much as I do with the process. But
while process is key for artists, what the public experiences, tends to be the product, separated from its process: the artists’ workings, in the word processor, the rehearsal studio, the painting loft, the digital darkroom, are behind the scenes: a private individual, idiosyncratic struggle between artist and artefact. Thus art becomes product. And what artists do, the investigations they make to get to the product, becomes insignificant.

It is this misconception, I think, which leads to hierarchies where STEM subjects are considered different from art subjects, and more important. We have forgotten that art is a process of thinking; of learning to think; of organising the world; of considering different perspectives; even acquiring and further developing empathy; for the processes of the arts can be considered as applied philosophy; problem solving; link making. We have made a hierarchy. STEM is all. The arts are a hobby, an addition, a spare time activity. Even, dare I say it, when I went to school, for the less smart kids. We have ignored that the arts make a huge billion pound contribution to the British economy. Every pound that the Arts Council distributes to arts organisations and artists puts 7 more back into the British economy. We export artwork internationally. Darren Henley, Chief Exec of Arts Council England writes eloquently about what he calls the arts dividend, and I urge you to read his book if you want to explore further the economic benefits of funding the arts.

The lack of transparency about the individual processes of artmaking, and arts ambiguity is what makes art problematic as a research output, and why many proponents of PaR have called for what Robin Nelson terms ‘complementary writing’ (2013) and Henk Borgdorff ‘Exposition’ (2012). It is also sometimes termed exegesis, or explanation. Such exegesis or exposition (which might not necessarily be a traditional journal articles, but programme notes, or rich documentation, annotated photography, conference papers and so on), such exposition exposes the investigative aesthetic imperative, the thinking and the process leading to, and ordinarily hidden behind, the materiality of an artefact or lost in its live iteration and ephemerality.
In trying to explain all this to mystified or sometimes sceptical Faculty, some of them artists, I decided I needed a schema. So I made this to try to model that what artists do when they make work is not so dissimilar from what scientists do when they make work: it’s not meant to be viewed like this so I apologise if the text is unreadable on a slide. See me afterwards if you’d like to see more of it! Or have anything further elucidated! But, my thesis is that it all begins with curiosity. A ‘What if’. This is the history of our species. Our investigation of the world, our making sense of the world began with art as a world-view, art as a means to navigate the mystery, art as a means of explaining the world to ourselves. The cave paintings in France and Spain attest to this. And technology was there too in the flint knives, needles and scrapers: they have always been in it together. There never was a ‘versus’. And shouldn’t be today. Art and science both examine the world to make an order out of its chaos; it’s just that the methods of investigation follow different routes. And I reject the privileging of one route over another. I have no time to expand, but there is plenty of thinking and writing about knowledges out there: the tacit knowledge of Michael Polanyi; the Phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty…

And in between art and traditional research, I put the PaR strand, which I call a disambiguation of the processes and the product, something which I feel still permits the artwork to be ambiguous in its own right. This is what makes art so compelling, and why Shakespeare is still performed: in the ambiguities of his work, his words, we find an eternity of relevances to ourselves.

So this is a call for the arts in the almost overwhelming tide of the emphasis on STEM subjects. It is a call to recognise the thinking in the idiosyncratic doing. And the inroads that we can make into arts ongoing investigation into what it is to be human.
Consider what Gavin Wade, director of Eastside Projects, a Birmingham-based public arts scheme, has said: “I believe that engineers can learn a lot from the methodical and wilful thinking of artists” (cited in Cave, 2017: online).

Consider that since 2011, there has also been a programme called *Arts at CERN*, the particle physics research centre, bringing together prominent scientists, engineers, and artists which aims to, in the words of Charlotte Warakaulle, CERN’s director for international relations, “to inspire each other in new creative expressions,” (Cave, ibid.).

And this is not new, this integration of arts and sciences. Consider Leonard da Vinci, the original Renaissance man. We know him as an artist, for, if nothing else, the *Mona Lisa*, but he was gifted with what Helen Gardener calls ‘unquenchable curiosity’ (Gardner, 2000): he was the polymath of the Italian Renaissance being as he was an artist, a mathematician, an engineer, an inventor, an anatomist. He made discoveries in optics, geology and hydrodynamics. He was the poster boy for the Renaissance Humanism, a movement which challenged what came to be known as utilitarianism, as championed by Jeremy Bentham, and which grips us today. What use are the arts? What do they do? So, consider this a clarion call for the arts as more than a hobby. Consider it a call for recognition of the knowledges embedded in process; for messing about; for colour; for glitter and glue; for singing; for paint; for improvisation; for the value of the ephemeral experience; the thinking in action; in doing; in making. Consider Descartes’s most famous soundbite and reconfigure it: I make therefore, I think. For the arts are a process of investigation, of thinking. They lead to new insights. We just have to ensure, as practitioner researchers, that these insights are effectively shared. And unless the main insight we have, that the arts are more than a hobby, we must deal with following provocation: why shouldn’t we take the arts out of state funded education: they could happen in extra-curricular time, couldn’t they?
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Accepting and dealing with the ups-and-downs of doing Collaborative (Action) Research.

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Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some of my ideas about collaboration and especially about what a conference like CARN can bring to all of us if we are open for collaboration and learning from each other. I will focus my speech on critical friendship, one of my research interests of the last 15 years. Critical friendship is one of the things that can lead to ups and can as well lead to downs in doing collaborative research.

I have learned through my research that critical friendship is problematic. It is a fascinating experience, but as well it is often unsafe. Of course I knew that already from my own experience, but the interesting thing is that I learned more clearly and concretely that each of us experiences his or her own ups-and-downs in critical friendship. Each of us experiences her own problems and feelings of joy and unsafeness in being a critical friend.

The concept of critical friendship

First of the difficulties is the term ‘critical friend’. Especially the word critical appears to be difficult. At least in Dutch and in my organisation critical is not always understood in its full range. When I look it up in the dictionary, I see that critical not only means disapproving or criticizing, it also has the meaning of important, serious, discriminating. Those last meanings are often forgotten.

Combining the two elements is difficult as well. When we ask our students to support each other as critical friends, most of them are inclined to put more emphasis on the friend-part. But others are showing the critical side with full commitment. The same can apply in other relationships, also here at the conference.
As I will argue later, acting as a critical friend can be learned. And we at our masters programme try to teach our students to be critical friends. And that is rather successful, I must say. First of all the concept of critical friendship needs to be agreed upon and discussed among the participants. For our master programme we have developed the following definition (Swet, J. van, Corvers, L. & Dijk, I. van, 2009)

‘A critical friend is a student in a critical friendship group who helps a fellow student to do his or her research and write a research report. He or she does this by asking critical questions, contributing his or her own perspective to the discussion, providing information or offering advice. The critical friend takes responsibility neither for the content of the research, nor for the report or the research process. A critical friend reads drafts of chapters and comments on them, helps the student researcher to think about the research question and the research design, helps with data analysis, and so on.’

**Learning to be a critical friend**

Although teaching and practicing critical friendship is important, at the same time the way how each of us acts as a critical friend is influenced by our own life history as well. I will give you a glimpse into my own history and will mainly focus on the influence of experiences from my childhood.

I was born in Rotterdam and I took my directness in communication, which is characteristic for Rotterdammers, more or less for granted. My father was a trader, a broker in butter, cheese and milk powder. I am sure I took over a bit of his specific business sense and way of working.

It was only later, especially through my international experiences, that I started to realize that I had these characteristics and also that they are sometimes helpful, but often not. And moreover, that I had to handle these carefully and cautiously, should reflect on them and improve them as far as possible.

Attending CARN conferences has certainly helped me in this process and has had a lot of influence. If I only think about the openness that I have experienced. I remember the warmth with which all participants, also beginning action researchers, were welcomed.

I remember the role models in critical friendship, like Bridget Somekh who I see sitting in the room to my pleasure. I am sure you will be a critical friend for many of us today. This all helped me to make my implicit knowledge, also the knowledge about myself, more explicit.

In short: CARN has helped me to be a better critical friend.

I have gathered a few quotes of action researchers and of international students that show the importance, including the ups-and-downs, of critical friendship.

Such as:

*Iterative learning best in a context of a co-operative peer group that can provide mutual support and challenge. Co-researchers develop a quality of self-reflective...*
inquiring attention which shifts their focus from seeking a desired outcome to the process of learning itself. (Reason, 1999)

Collaboration among members of the group as a ‘critical community’. (Altrichter e.a. 1990; p. 19-20)

In a study we did in our international students groups (Swet, J. van, Roosken, B., Siebelink, J. Ansems, A. & Hartog, L. den 2009) they formulated lovely quotes, like these:

Critical friend is like falling in love: easy in the beginning but staying in love is difficult.

I want to use this brilliant idea / concept in whatever I could. I know the stars and the shortcomings in the aspect of time.

The critical friend group is one of my richest experiences. It is wonderful to come out of my shell and to do what I feel as what I have to do.

And yes, when I met those students years after their master in their own countries and asked them what they had really taken home and learned from our masters, they often mentioned this concept of critical friendship. I remember for example a group of Indian students, who told me that it had changed their lives and that they now, for example, really listened to their employees and their spouses.

There is, of course, not just one way of being a critical friend.

The self-knowledge I spoke about, helps to prevent the downs in critical friendship and to have as many ups as possible. Self-knowledge about what kind of critical friend you are.

Critical friends and social capital and network theories
In our more recent research we have gained inspiration by exploring collaboration through the lenses of social capital and network theories (See for example the open access publication: Swet, J. van & Otter, M. den (Eds) 2014); especially chapter 9 written by Naorah Lockhart : A brief introduction to social capital and network theories.)

One of the starting points in the theory of social capital is, that nobody can know all that is needed in a certain situation. So you have to collaborate.

Professionals who share knowledge and resources will potentially accomplish more than if they would work in isolation. Much research has done about how such collaboration works.

Social capital theory uses the concepts of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Critical friendship can occur in all three types. In bonding it happens between people that share a professional identity, such as the students in our masters programme. Bridging social capital occurs between two people of different professional background. Such as often is the case in discussions at the CARN conference. Linking
social capital happens between two people at different professional levels within an institutional hierarchy. Maybe is an example when academic researchers, teachers and their school principal collaborate in a research project. Or when teachers, parents and children work together.

One of the concepts in these theories is the concept of boundary crossing. As soon as professionals from a different professional background, with multiple roles, start to collaborate, or more so, before that collaboration starts, you need people who are willing and able to cross boundaries. And not everybody is as daring and doing. In all this research it becomes clear that trust, language and culture are crucial. As a boundary crosser you enter areas you don’t know well, where you don’t know the language, the jargon, the customs.

It is quite common that you even have prejudices about the customs and expertise of that other profession or other group.

This conference offers ample opportunities to utilize our social capital. In the sessions, and also more informally during breaks and dinner. There is so much knowledge and experience present these days. Together our social capital is huge. As the conference website says: at this conference we have multiple ways of understanding, acting and reflecting.

**Flight hours for critical friendship**

As I mentioned already, you can learn to collaborate and become better at it.

For example the work of Sennett (2008; 2012) has inspired me a lot and shows that craftsmanship can be developed and learned. He writes about craftsmen like carpenters or musicians. For the craft of collaboration, and especially complex forms of collaboration, he bases his thoughts largely on the world of diplomacy. He argues that in order to become a real craftsman, whatever craft you are doing, you need a lot of flight hours, 10,000 at least.

I do hope that this conference gives us the opportunity to make a lot of flight hours of high quality. That we will be each other’s critical friend. Not just friend and not just critical. That we will try to combine both in the wide range of its meanings.

That we will try to understand each other’s language. And dare to ask if we don’t. That we are curious towards each other. I am looking forward to learning from all of you and do my bit as I have learned every year and tried to contribute every year.

Especially, I would like to reflect on our experiences when we meet again on Saturday morning for the keynote panel responses. The critical and provoking question I would like to raise for this conference is:

How can we deal with the ups and downs of critical friendship during this CARN conference?

And …why would we?
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Challenging Action Research as a research method

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This contribution is based on my talk as part of the Keynote panel at the CARN conference in Manchester, 2018.

In 2005 Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis wrote an article, published in Educational Action research, looking back and reflecting on the impact of their book *Becoming Critical* published in 1986. In this article they were surprised over what had happened as captured in the following quote:

*as action research increasingly became an institutionalised model of in-service teacher education, so some forms of action research have become detached from any emancipatory aspirations and transformed into little more than a research method that could be readily assimilated to and accommodated within the broader requirements of the orthodox research paradigms we had intended it to replace.* (Carr & Kemmis, 2005 p. 351)

Since then, another 13 years have passed and research methods have become every day practice for teachers driven globally in search for the “right method” to get good results in striving to become a nation to count on.

A number of different methods, all similar, but with different connotations, reach out to teachers. Some examples are Lesson/Learning studies, Inquiry circle, Design-based research, Study-/Research circle, and Assessment for learning. They all build on processes and actions striving for change in classrooms with the aim to improve student development and learning. By this I do not critique any of these methods per se, but what I found as a challenge is that they all are composed of similar processes and very often act outside a specific context or site. My criticism is that these methods focus on activities and not on understandings.

Going back to the Carr and Kemmis definition of Action Research in 1986 it is not just about activities, it is also about understanding improvements. They also claim there are two essential aims of Action Research: to improve and to involve. Their definition clearly captures the need to develop understandings while doing Action Research, and that it is done collaboratively. Educational Action Research is about:

• *Improving aspects of your practice,*
• *Improvement of the understandings of the practice by its participants*
• *Improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place*

(Carr & Kemmis, 1986 p. 165)

By improvement of understandings of the practice and the situation in which it takes place, understandings widen and this provides a better ground for further actions. Doing this together with colleagues can give a good grounding to enable the whole school to develop for a sustainable future.
In a study following up teachers who had been enrolled in an Action Research program in schools in both Sweden and Australia, Christine Edwards Groves and myself found that many of the teachers doing Action Research had developed capacities for leading. They continued on after the program to take up roles as leaders facilitating teacher’s professional learning in their own sites, and continue to lead teacher learning in local contexts (often in preference to taking on more formal leadership positions eg principal roles). In a way they became drivers of change. In this research we discovered particularly how Action Research generated leading practices by the teachers involved in Action Research (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2013). It was surprising how many of these teachers continued with Action Research but also took on a role as a leader with the purpose of sharing it with others, as Melanie says:

> At the same time the system gave us the days, the time to attend the ten sessions, without that it would have been impossible. You as the facilitator also helped me to keep seeing that I could do this and meet the challenges along the way. It was this, as well as knowing I need to be developing. And so this really made me look at what I was doing and I knew I had to change, but I also then wanted to keep on with this to help other teachers as I knew this worked. (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2013 p. 130)

With this example and our studies my argument is that improvement of the understanding is needed to be able to continually change practices as in the definition by Carr and Kemmis above. But moreover we also need to find ways where teachers are the drivers of change and lead their colleagues in dialogue to nurture these understandings. Based on our research, we argue for a fourth characterising feature to be added that accounts for flow-on effects of Action Research that extends beyond the immediacy of the project. That is, we argue that Action Research also:

- improve understandings and practices that generate longer-term capacities and practices for leading.

This fourth dimension extends Carr and Kemmis’ work in ways that address and recognise issues of sustainability of practice development.

In our study (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2013), participating teachers talked about both internal and external conditions that needed to be in place. The inner conditions were about stage of career and a readiness of taking on new steps as a professional. They also talked about desire and determination for improvement, not simply for student performance but for life-long learning of self and professional development. Participants talked about praxis as the moral good aspect of activities and ways of working for the public good. Lastly, personal responsibility was mentioned for self-development and for the learning and development of others and society. External conditions needed to continue leading teachers for professional learning include:

- the provision of legitimate time to fulfil the requirements of their Action Research (reading, improving through actions, sharing);
- support from principals, along with provision of opportunities for sharing and critiquing practices with colleagues;
that the project extends over time (not a one-off session);
that the project relates to their own site-based circumstances and needs;
that participant learning and its processes were validated by others.

Our data suggests there is a strong connection between Action Research, professional learning and the development of leading. From our participant accounts, this depends on the conditions which support this development. We can show how professional learning and leadership practices can be understood as related (and developed and sustained) in practice ecologies and how practices travel across historical time as the teachers learn from one another.

Learning for leading professional learning is necessary for a sustainable educational future. In recent studies it is obvious that certain conditions have to be set to be able to fulfil such a development. One such condition is time and space. In a study using the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) to analyse how a communicative space could be a mechanism for enabling teachers to engage, it was found that learning-focused meaning-making activities were connected to systematic quality work through Action Research. Further the results reveal the practices and practice architectures that enabled the middle leader to conduct the work of leading the development of his or her colleagues (Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015).

By focusing more on understanding practices and the situation where it takes place, Action Research might be a direction for empowering teachers to take on a middle leading role and become the drivers of change for the future in schools (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, Hardy & Rönnerman, 2018).

So, the challenge for Action Research is to go beyond the view of Action Research as seen as just a research method for teachers.
References


1. Introduction

Action Research Communities for Language Teachers (ARC) is a project funded by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (2015-18) with the following aims:

- to make techniques for action research widely available to language teachers across Europe through the establishment of a community of practice;
- to strengthen professional networks by linking academic expertise on action research and good practice in language classrooms;
- to contribute to improvements in language education by giving teachers access to better action research;
- to enable teachers to reflect on practice and to propose and test innovations within a collaborative community.

The overarching objectives of ARC are to demonstrate the mutually advantageous relationship between research and practice and to show how undertaking action research can provide practical benefits for both teachers and learners (Burns, 2005; Elliott, 1991; Altrichter & Posch, 2007). The project team includes partners from Austria, Iceland, Romania and the UK and associate partners from Canada, Italy and Switzerland. The project team is designing action research tools which will support language teachers in developing classroom practice and will help to create European models for peer learning activities which can be implemented at both school and national levels.

2. Our approach

As members of an international project team we come from different action research traditions. One approach we have taken that needs to be mentioned here is that of Altrichter and Posch (2007) in “Lehrerinnen und Lehrer erforschen ihren Unterricht”. The reason for this choice is the practical nature of this book, providing teachers with guidelines for carrying out their own classroom research. Having therefore agreed on a practical and pragmatic methodology, we began with initial networking and discussion meetings to set out our strategy and to identify our key priorities. It was extremely important for us to provide a wide audience of language teachers from different sectors with access to information about the benefits of action research, knowledge about how to conduct it and opportunities for collaboration and debate from the outset. We therefore organised a series of training, networking and dissemination events and workshops to invite participation in the project. The first workshop was held during International Week at the Pedagogical University, Tyrol, Austria in April 2016 and was focused on fostering discussion about quality and enhancement and the potential role of action research in improving professional practice in language teaching at tertiary level across Europe. This was followed by an
action research workshop for German language teachers in Sibiu/Hermannstadt, Transylvania in October 2016 which was organised by the Romanian ARC-team member. It was clearly a big challenge to convey the meaningfulness of action research for teachers as well as providing action research tools within a three-day workshop. Moreover, for busy teachers attending continuing professional development (CPD) courses, the hope is often that the course will provide tangible information and ideas transferable to the classroom. For this reason, we decided to design the action research workshop around a so-called “Content pack”. The theme chosen was “learning about a target-language-country culture in the German classroom”. As the providers were from Austria, the choice of country was Austria and we decided to provide lesser-known information about the country and also to trigger off thoughts about concepts and pre-conceptions. We also wanted to provide learning materials on a range of topics and suggest possible applications in classroom practice. From the point of view of content, we wanted the teachers to go away with a pre-plan for a unit on a cultural theme.

All activities such as considering pre-conceptions of Austria were set up to provide impetus for reflection and to lead to an action research mind-set. Throughout the three days, besides the content pack, the action research thread was prominent consisting of input but also tools demonstrated, such as during an introductory phase working from analytic discussion and demonstrating different feedback loops. The final phase of the workshop involved lesson preparation. The focus here was on joint planning both for lessons to be held in different schools based on materials shown during the two days and action research planning. The teachers worked on a strategy to move from individual ideas for a lesson to a shared vision and a practical plan. Part of the challenge was to set up an action research plan and participants were asked to formulate expectations and agree upon ways of ascertaining whether expectations were fulfilled. The main tools chosen were observation and learner feedback.

A key output from this workshop was a template for a three-day action research workshop which can be disseminated more widely to teachers. (see Appendix)

The next stage was a two-day workshop in Graz, Austria in November 2016 which was attended by language teachers from schools and university language teachers and teacher educators from 31 countries. The workshop introduced participants to action research concepts and tools and gave them an opportunity to explore aspects of their own practice collaboratively. We used the analytic discourse method to support them in gaining an in-depth understanding of an issue of concern in their own classroom practice (Altrichter & Posch, 2007). Working in a group, participants presented information about the issue and were then posed questions which did not include statements, critical comments or suggestions for possible solutions but were aimed at identifying the elements of the problem more clearly and making them explicit. ‘An analytic discourse has proved to be an effective method of gaining in-depth understanding of a problem’ (Altrichter & Posch, 1993: 60). They subsequently came together in groups to identify common themes of interest and to formulate and develop proposals for collaborative action research projects, which they planned to carry out in their own classrooms in the months after the workshop in a community of practice. They agreed to support one other with members of the project team acting as critical friends (Wennnergren, 2016).
3. Results
Participants at the Sibiu/Hermannstadt workshop worked in groups to plan teaching units on the following topics: “Seeing Austria through Windows”, “Austria through Austrian Poetry”, “Austria through Realism” and “Austria through Austrian Physicists.” All members of the groups carried out the lessons at their own schools resulting in comparative reports focusing on expectations, success factors, surprises and lessons learnt. The teachers analysed and compared their experiences.

Participants from the Graz workshop conducted 11 collaborative projects between November 2016 and March 2017 on the following themes:

- Does an explicit focus on critical thinking skills in our lesson planning and instruction enable students to engage in critical thinking? (Participating countries: Albania, Netherlands, Malta, Latvia)
- How can pupils’ language skills be enhanced by using news media and Facebook sharing in language teaching? (Croatia, Iceland)
- Breaking barriers: Can we identify barriers for professional learning English as a second language at university level? (Armenia, France)
- What is the role of the teacher in university student-centred activities? (Finland, France)
- How does teaching vocabulary learning strategies contribute to learner autonomy in CLIL & MFL classrooms? (Ireland)
- Improving target language use in German lessons (Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Romania)
- Using the European Portfolio of Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) as a self-reflection tool for improving pre- and in-service teachers’ competences. (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Greece)
- Challenges of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers (Czech Republic, Poland)
- CLIL in secondary vocational schools seen through students’ perspectives. (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia)
- Intercultural projects in English lessons (Austria, Denmark, Montenegro)
- The teacher as co-constructor of knowledge (Bulgaria, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Slovenia)

Results were reported in either English or German in the form of a report or a PowerPoint presentation providing details of research questions, participants, action research plans and timeframes, action research tools used and main findings. These have been shared among the project community via Padlet while abstracts have been disseminated via the project website

4. **Next steps**
The project team is currently working with participants to finalise their results and to explore their ideas for the directions their research could take in future. Members of the team are also working on an annotated action research spiral, which is intended to be a tool for language teachers who would like to carry out action research and are compiling a glossary of action research terminology and details of open access resources. All project results are due to be shared and further developed at a network meeting in Graz in May 2018. We hope that all these results and resources will support language teachers with an interest in inquiry in getting started on action research in their own classrooms.
References


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EU Project on Quality (dialogue sheets in English, German, French & Spanish) http://www.lanqua.eu/speaq-project/
## Appendix: ARC-Workshop-Template: A three-day path into action research - 3-day workshop pack

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe Day 1</th>
<th>Getting into action research</th>
<th>Content-pack</th>
<th>Aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Opening &amp; introductions: Activity finding out what we have in common</td>
<td>Learning about target-language country culture Austria</td>
<td>To open up, to get into the mood to work together challenging ideas and developing teaching</td>
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</table>
| 45 minutes      | What do I already know about the theme? Activities:  
• Letters of the alphabet  
• Short clips on perspectives  
What surprises me? Different from expected? | Getting into the theme  
• Do we all have the same ideas when we think about Austria?  
• How do be an Austrian | To clarify that there are different approaches to a topic, different pre-conceptions, different ideas on what is important. |
| 120 minutes     | Analytic discourse Timeframe possibly including time to finish posters & short break | Posters on teaching about the target-language country: my status quo. | • To get to know each other in some professional depth  
• To demonstrate an action research tool  
• To demonstrate a “different kind of discussion”  
• To show that discussions about teaching are not always critical, comparative… |
| 60 minutes      | • From analytic discourse to perspectives on theme  
• The ARC Project within ECML programmes  
• Short memo feedback on Day 1 | Current (opposing) trends in Landeskunde & intercultural learning | • To bring the strands together  
• To give input on approaches without dealing out recipes  
• To introduce the project  
• To show participants what the ECML has to offer  
• To demonstrate a feedback cycle |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe Day 2</th>
<th>Getting into action research</th>
<th>Content-pack</th>
<th>Aims</th>
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</table>
| 15 minutes      | Welcome & arrival activity  
Different ideas & perspectives  
Comments on feedback from Day 1 & procedures for Days 2 & 3 | True or not true? Which of three stories is not an Austrian story? | • To bring group back together, e.g. coming in from morning a school  
• To continue with multi-perspective thinking  
• To demonstrate taking feedback on board |
<p>| 30 minutes      | Some ideas about action research | To provide a theoretical framework. |
| 120 minutes     | Input on theme in form of islands | To provide content for development of joint lessons |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Getting into action research</th>
<th>Content-pack</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5 minutes</strong></td>
<td>Welcome &amp; comments on evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60 minutes</strong></td>
<td>Ideas on joint planning</td>
<td>Our vision for good lessons about the cultures of target-language countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reference to learning study procedures</td>
<td>To open up ideas for joint planning/ joint visions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Group diamond activity to find a common vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>120 minutes</strong></td>
<td>Developing a lesson together</td>
<td>Lessons on the culture of a target-language country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson formats on the culture of a target-language country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60 minutes</strong></td>
<td>Presentations &amp; conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “What is different now”?</td>
<td>To stimulate interest for the work of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Expectations how the lesson will work in the different classes</td>
<td>To demonstrate a feedback cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Clarifying reports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Official written evaluation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Paper-ball evaluation to say goodbye</td>
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</tbody>
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- Aspects of life in Austria
- Regions
- Literature from Austria
- “My life in my environment”
- Thinking about stereotypes

- To ensure that joint planning will work in a concrete way
- To demonstrate a feedback cycle

- To bring group back together, e.g. coming in from morning a school
- To demonstrate taking feedback on board
Nomad Enquiry - towards a new ethics for research practice

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“Speak from where you are. Account for your situated position. Don’t do the ‘God Trick’.” (Haraway, 1988)

We live in troubling times. Issues such as environmental degradation, mass migration, species extinction, increasing technological mediation, widening equality gaps, precarity, overt and violent racism and extremism comprise just some of the global challenges facing the planet today. What do these issues mean for the way we educate and research? And, given the mess humans have made of things, what new ethical frameworks should be enacted to take account of this ‘posthuman’ predicament (Braidotti, 2013)?

The concept of ‘human’ imprinted in us all began in Enlightenment times. Leonardo’s Vitruvian Man sketch idealised humanity as a Renaissance David Beckham - white, male, physically gifted, affluent enough to be nourished and muscular, European and all the other assumptions we wrap up in what society thinks is ‘normal’. Although Enlightenment thinkers were clear that the road to human perfection was education - great for us - they didn’t tell us how that would make us whiter, more able or more male. So those of us who don’t match up have always fallen short.

The Enlightenment didn’t create colonisation - greed for power and money did that. But it did set up an internalised hierarchy, with Vitruvian Beckham at the top. The rest of us - frankly, most of us in the world - became easier to ‘other’. And that’s where we find ourselves, differently privileged and conflicted about what all of this means for us as researchers (Patel, 2016).

So this is the impact of ‘humanity’. On a global scale environmental degradation, mass migration, the rise of the far right and accelerated capitalism - we could grow that list ad infinitum. Within education, a complex and confused mess of funding cuts, mental ill-health, managerialism, the burdens of bureaucracy, cultures of compliance and obedience. A petrified landscape, as Bergson (Foley, 2013) would say - practice entrapped in the packaged, risk-averse trappings of advanced educational capitalism.

As white researchers of privilege, working both within and outwith the academy and also in communities on and offline, we are troubled by our own positionality. Traditional research practice often fails to acknowledge our entangled and complex roles, with ‘ethics’ not a consistent discipline but a form to tick off along the way: externally imposed frameworks rather than embodied commitments to ethical practice. Anxious to avoid the ‘God-trick’ (Haraway, 1988, p.575) of the all-seeing and all-knowing observer, we are seeking out new modes of enquiry that avoid or (however briefly) smooth out territorialised, striated spaces which are claimed by the powerful, in order that we have ‘spaces to dance’ (Mycroft and Weatherby, 2015, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, 2003). Our mission is to make room for new thinking to emerge. We consider the
colonising nature of academia and with each new project, ask, in the words of Leigh Patel (2016, p.88), ‘Why me? Why now? Why here?’

We have taken up this challenge as self-funded individuals embarking on the fieldwork stages of our PhD/EdD research. Written into our approach is the diffractive practice of sharing our thinking (Barad, 2014), not necessarily in a linear way but where our paths touch. All the work is not our work, but we have ‘white work’ to do and we actively work in solidarity with others, breaking the filter bubble and embracing newness.

We are concerned with the slipperiness of language and how a lack of precision is used to cover up groupthink and oppressive practice. This is writ large in ‘fake news’ and plays out in industrial relations, where false narratives are used in place of straightforward conversations. Trade unions, fighting a rearguard action, find themselves complicit. The daily ‘walking of boundaries’ as an approach to personal ethical practice is important as is verbatim representation. In this way an anti-hegemonic, anti-axiomatic, iconoclastic practice can be enacted, inviting diffractive scrutiny from peers who are equal as thinkers. We describe this methodology (after others, such as Pam Greet, 2017) using the metaphor of the bowerbird: a non-human ‘agent’ who repurposes waste into beauty to create ‘bowers’ decorated with shiny blue items to attract his mate (Mycroft, 2019). We continue to identify ourselves as activists: our work is a ‘thing that does’, a way of practising stoicism and endurance in challenging times. This, for us, is anti-fascist work.

In this context, which attempts to transgress the boundaries of an education system mired in capitalist hegemonic thinking, the idea of ‘methodology’ can be problematic. Academic research is generally constrained within fixed chronological frames, as positivist traditions encourage linear investigations which lead to an end point. Here, the world is seen to be a rational, ordered place with a clearly defined past, present and future. To counter this, we employ a ‘slow ontology’ (Ulmer, 2017) which encourages us to work with different rhythms of inquiry; where writing becomes ‘...a diffraction—a dispersal—of time, space, and matter across different wavelengths, moving in different directions at different speeds.’ (p.208). This may mean us picking up the threads of previously explored ideas, as we revisit them; going deeper through longer rumination and with a willingness to stay open to the world. In doing so, we make fresh connections and disrupt academic temporalities; ‘...not returning as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetimesmatterings), new diffraction patterns.’ (Barad, 2014, p.168). Slow methodologies may include immersion in natural environments via thinking walks, psychogeographies, and the employment of metaphors from nature, as we de-centre the human and bring a material, embodied focus to our work. The bowerbird metaphor provides a strong visual image for how this approach can work.

Diffracting new ideas through different lenses in this way may also cause us to review and reframe familiar and much-loved pedagogical theory, such as critical pedagogy. In one example we have taken Parker J Palmer’s (1998) idea of
‘radical hospitality’ and expanded it to include non-human participants in learning. An enquiry into the role of pets in learning and reflective practice brought in both new materialist and post-anthropocentric viewpoints whilst drawing on the liberatory notions of social and community learning implicit in Palmer’s work.

Our methods, while de-centering ourselves, at the same time bring the researcher back in, through examinations of positionality and influence. This may be through reflexive work (alone, and in dialogue), or through the use of creative means; as Clover and Stalker (2007) suggest, ‘Art breaks open a dimension to new experience.’ Utilising Ellingson’s (2017) idea of ‘crystallisation’ encourages us to explore multiple ways of knowing, extending the traditional idea of triangulation to a wider spectrum which draws on embodied responses, artist re-imaginings, and affective reactions in addition to standard means of data collection. For us, this might take the form of poetic responses, paper and digital maps, and visual rapportage techniques which allow us to interrogate more deeply these affective domains.

Our work is thus multiply nomadic in that it doesn’t subscribe to any one pre-defined methodology or external set of ethics. It doesn’t ‘belong’ to an institution or, in any fixed sense, to ourselves. Our findings draw deeply on the work of those who have gone before and those who are travelling their own roads alongside us and who briefly join us in ‘constellations’ of practice (Mycroft and Sidebottom, 2018). Each presentation or publication (we include tweets and blogs in this) brings with it a shifting set of perspectives, which we then consider and inscribe on our own thinking. We are very aware of mapping our way through the creation of new landscapes and invite our work to in turn be taken forward by others. Braidotti (2018, p.7) refers to this as ‘cartography’, where, ‘...a cartography is the record of both what we are ceasing to be and what we are in the process of becoming...’ She defines critical thinking as being about the creation of ‘new concepts, or navigational tools to help us through the complexities of the present...’ Times change, and thinking moves on.

Nomadic enquiry requires little leaps of faith in order to progress, as long as we sweep behind us too, picking up the blue shiny things, self-interrogating and walking our ethical boundaries. Within organisations, we are frustrated by the need to fit life and work into boxes. PhD research knits all of that together because it is centred around a personal ontology, it becomes a daily practice (like yoga, running, meditation) and, however briefly, contributes to the forming of new constellations.

When the outside world is cold, other thinkers - written, spoken, observed and heard - are our friends. As nomads, we are never alone. Those other voices challenge and sustain us in our research practice.
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A critical discussion of the role of pedagogical action research (PedAR) in academic staff development

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Introduction
In this paper we (LA and LN) reflect on our experience of having supported colleagues in higher education to develop their own pedagogical action research (PedAR) projects. In our work we have led and contributed to action research support in our home and other institutions, and we have engaged with colleagues nationally through the production of sector case studies of action research (Arnold & Norton, 2018). As a result of this experience and in many ongoing conversations with each other, we use our personal reflections to pose some questions that have troubled us about adopting action research within academic staff development processes.

Action Research has been a popular component of academic staff development in recent years. In a 2017 national meeting of Higher Education Academy accredited professional development scheme leaders LA asked for a show of hands that revealed that approximately two-thirds of institutions represented (approximately 60 in the room) had an action research element to either their formal Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (or similar), or their wider professional development scheme. As action research is increasingly adopted into formal staff development, we argue that it may be in danger of becoming a mechanistic tool for applied research, rather than a transformative approach which can not only engender deep reflection but also challenge the pedagogical status quo. In a call to the university sector, we ask, is action research being used to unintentionally reinforce the passive acceptance of either pedagogical practices that are widely used but poorly evidenced or of unwelcome change?

Action Research and its place in staff development
Action Research used as a component within formal staff development in the university sector tends to take one of two forms:

1. Formal programmes that lead to a qualification (for example PGCert, MA, EdD), in which the action research projects are part, or all, of an assessed assignment.
2. PedAR as part of establishing a career path in Learning and Teaching in which the action research projects are opened to peer review and public scrutiny.

In formal postgraduate certificate programmes, lecturers and others working in higher education, such as librarians, careers advisors and technologists, develop projects that help to advance their own practice and expand their knowledge, while also gaining academic credit. We offer three hypothetical examples of projects which typify the nature of PedAR within the context of a staff development programme:

2 Accredited Programme Leader Network Event at Manchester Metropolitan University on 25th January 2018
• An individual biology lecturer noticed a lack of student engagement in his lectures. In response, after reading and exploring the issues, he implemented a team-based learning approach for one semester. He used weekly feedback surveys to continually refine his teaching.

• A librarian wanted to develop better support for students reading techniques. Over a three month period he set up drop-in sessions, developed online help resources and provided a workshop for academic staff. He used focus groups and surveys to assess the impact of his action and to inform further developments to this programme, which was then adopted fully by the library.

• A business lecturer followed her hunch that social media might help with student transition by generating a sense of belonging. She set up and encouraged use of social media platforms for course wide engagement with tutors, for peer-to-peer support and to build a sense of community between two small cohorts. She used analytics data, student interviews and observation to evaluate and further develop the approach.

These and similar projects have honourable intentions; they clearly succeed in helping students and improving teaching and support. We have both facilitated projects such as these and have often seen great learning and ‘lightbulb moments’ in the personal pedagogy of the practitioner researchers and in the development of good relationships with students and colleagues. Nevertheless we have reservations about the implications of this well intentioned industry.

In the second form of action research, colleagues who are forging a path in learning and teaching may find they are actively discouraged by line managers who do not see its worth. Yet there is increasing importance attached to the professionalisation of university teaching, aligned to the demand for teaching excellence that is currently being driven by the UK government’s introduction of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). While this would seem to provide an opportunity for more academics to demonstrate engagement with their own teaching practice, the current ethos of technical rationalism might encourage those who do action research to take pedagogical problems and to attempt solutions that are superficial and temporary rather than transformational. Our concern as staff developers is to support colleagues to carry out meaningful action research projects that will enhance their students’ learning experience and deepen their own professional practice, rather than be diverted to solely demonstrate ‘measures of improvement.’

**The limitations of Action Research in pedagogy**

At the CARN conference (October 2018) we proposed that the types of action research that we have encountered were relatively ‘safe’. They tended to work with, and even reflect the language of, management agendas on teaching excellence; they worked to reinforce the status-quo of pedagogic research; and they did not reflect often privately held views and controversial concerns, of the sort that can be heard in the coffee room or around water coolers. We contend that the action research of staff development is not addressing the big issues of the day. With the rise of consumerism and increased bureaucracy, collegiality has given way to competitive academia. One of the consequences of this change has been that under the guise of change-based research there is a focus on micro-issues with limited reach. Part of the problem, we argue, is in a sector - wide narrative that celebrates the relatively minor
changes that are made, while remaining silent on significant, troubling issues. Among such issues, well known examples include promoting the spurious myth that marking is objective and reliable (see Bloxham et al, 2016); the stranglehold of the external examiner system (Medland, 2018); curricula and assessment focused on specified learning outcomes (see Hussey and Smith, 2008).

Across the higher education sector there is undoubted concern amongst staff about the rise of bureaucracy, consumerism and managerialism; about the pace with which academic work is required (Berg and Seeber, 2016); and about the decline in academic diversity. Jones-Devitt (cited in Grove, 2018) uses the metaphor of zombies in HE to describe a sense that we are sleepwalking through a period of change with uncritical acceptance of both social inequalities and pedagogies that are proven not to work. One might assume that action research, by its definition as an approach which is collaborative, questioning, emancipatory and critical, is well placed to begin grappling with some of these difficult issues. By example, some of the pressing questions might include: What is the opportunity cost of innovative pedagogy? Do we need innovative pedagogy? What happened to student independence? What are the responsibilities of a student in today’s higher education system? How inclusive can higher education be? Yet instead some of the pedagogical action research seems to occupy safe, less controversial spaces. We have been asking ourselves why this is the case.

**The effects of experience**

Action Research within the context of staff development is often undertaken by relatively inexperienced members of staff. Even for experienced discipline researchers, pedagogical research and action research can feel like a different world which represents a shift away from familiar conventions. Colleagues undertaking action research often struggle with a different knowledge and research discourse, the unfamiliar flexibility, the lack of rules (replaced by principles) and the relevance and value of situated research. Action research can also reveal ineffective ways of teaching a subject that are ‘set in stone’ such as lectures where the emphasis is on knowledge transmission. These, if uncovered, can be difficult for newer members in a subject to challenge.

Those participating in staff development, may also feel that they have limited voice in the organisation; effectively lacking social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to influence others or to speak up and out. We are also beset with managing our own tensions when we encourage colleagues to carry out action research that may well be seen as less prestigious than subject-based research. LN suggests that staff developers need to be candid about this lest colleagues should feel they have been misled (see Norton, 2018).

We believe that as a result of these factors, staff charged with taking on action research tend to stick to safer ground, making incremental changes to their own practice and focusing on the type of change which is immediate rather than longer term. The focus on short-term change is often caused by the practicalities of shorter courses and assessment deadlines. PgCert, MA and EdD programmes often incorporate assessment tasks which can result in easy to design interventions. These tend to be carried out as one cycle and can result in a reflective account that is
‘performed’ to fulfil the assessment criteria, rather than a deeply felt and transformational change process.

The purpose of pedagogical action research (PedAR)
Reflecting on its purpose we have asked ourselves three interlinked questions. Is PedAR to:

1. Change our practice?
2. Change us as practitioners?
3. Address the troubling issues?

In formal teaching programmes we would argue that changing our practice and ourselves as practitioners are easier to teach and assess than encouraging colleagues to address the bigger and more fundamental issues. Specifically, PedAR is intended to trigger a change in our own practice and depending on how much freedom we have in our own context, small changes can be made (e.g. Angelo and Cross’s (1993) classroom assessment techniques one minute paper. Changing ourselves as practitioners is almost inevitable following action research and is relatively easy to demonstrate (e.g. a science lecturer realising there are other ways to collect data that are not objective but can be as valuable). When, however, colleagues come up against the troubling issues it becomes more difficult. An example from psychology is that independent thinking in psychology essays is encouraged but tends to be penalised if no evidence is given. This contradiction if tackled openly would challenge the subject itself as well as the way it is taught and assessed.

Ways forward
For taught programmes where the action research project is assessed, there are a number of ideas worth exploring. We could, for example, rethink the assessment criteria to inspire bolder studies. Part of the process might be to encourage methods that step outside a colleague’s comfort zone. A radical example would be asking colleagues to explore the potential of representing part of their findings in the form of a fictionalised account. Assessment criteria might also include some form of formal dissemination (such as conference presentations or journal papers) where colleagues can tell uncomfortable truths, but also through peer review might find that their own assumptions about those uncomfortable truths might be challenged and critiqued. For staff who are carrying out action research as part of a career trajectory in learning and teaching, such dissemination would be crucial and could well be part of a wider decision to network with other researchers and join the wider action research community, such as CARN itself which is both inclusive and supportive.

Conclusion
Rather than provide solutions, however, we are interested in this paper with raising a bigger question. We end with a provocation that colleagues may well recognise and ponder. Our concern is that CPD and formal teaching programmes in learning and teaching have hi-jacked pedagogical action research and diluted it. The unintended consequence has been a type of action research that has become a complicit part of a system that we should be challenging. The question becomes, how can we reclaim this territory?
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An Exploration into the Effectiveness of the Parental Tool ‘Let’s Talk’ Book, in Supporting Parents to Develop Emotional Language.

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Abstract
Emotional literacy and its implications on children’s lives has become a mainstream topic of discussion – not only for early years’ educators, but parents too. This participatory action research study explores the effectiveness of a new parental tool called the Let’s Talk book, in supporting parents in the development of emotional language in the home learning environment. Underpinned by theorists such as Salovey, Mayer, Tomkins, and others, this parental tool recognises the importance of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence as the motivating force in human experiences, and in particular during the formative years of a child’s life.

For the purposes of this action research project, a qualitative approach is being taken in the form of semi-structured questionnaires to assess the impact of the tool, with the method of data analysis being thematic. The main findings of the study suggest that while using the Let’s Talk book, parents and their children interact in more meaningful conversations using emotional language. Findings also show that families are using a wider range of emotional vocabulary, while all parents using the Let’s Talk book understand the concepts behind it.

Introduction
The aim of this action research project is to explore the views of parents using the parental tool called the Let’s Talk book. The concept and intention behind this is: to support parents in naming and describing emotional language to their children

- Aid children in naming and expressing emotional language
- Familiarise children with emotive expressions
- Help children form an understanding of other people’s emotions and feelings
- Have fun while reading and learning.
In recent years, a mounting body of research supports the value of educating young children in the importance of emotional intelligence (Dowling, 2014; Hyson, 2004; Lantieri, 2008). Internationally, the United Nations Children’s Fund (2014) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) clearly states that every child has an essential right to progress to “the maximum extent possible” while promoting the developmental needs for all children to be recognised as a right for every child. Governments and policy makers across Europe are also recognising the importance of introducing emotional literacy into the early years’ education sector and see these foundational years as a crucial time for child health and wellbeing (Bruce, 2011). At a national level in Ireland, the introduction of an early childhood curriculum framework brings the value of emotional literacy to the forefront of the Irish early years’ sector – emphasising the emotional well-being of the child as a key factor in the child’s development (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2019).

Emotional literacy is described by many sources as possessing the ability to understand, identify and express feelings and emotions (Nikolajeva, 2013; Schiller, 2009). Goleman meanwhile, states that “emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise, understand and manage our own emotions and to recognise, understand and influence the emotions of others” (1998, p.5). Both concepts are often intertwined, and it is widely noted that the ability to use emotional literacy and emotional intelligence can help foster positive relationships and can offer a solid base for learning and development (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

The Community Background
Established in Ireland during 2006/07, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) addresses the specific problem of educational disadvantage in marginalised communities in the Dublin Docklands and North East Inner City. Substantial research conducted in Ireland, and internationally, indicates that early learning is the foundation for all subsequent learning. ELI prioritises helping parents to develop their children’s social, emotional, language and thinking skills from an early age; thereby ensuring that children enter school ready to learn, with the skills they need to be successful throughout their education. The Let’s Talk parental tool is guided by a restorative practice (RP), a social science framework, alongside an early years’ pedagogical practice, known as the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP).

Parent Child Home Programme
Founded in the United States in 1965, PCHP is an innovative, home-based literacy and parenting programme that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. Over a two-year period, early years’ educators called ‘Home Visitors’ model oral language, reading and play during twice-weekly visits. The families then continue the activities in their own time, thereby enabling the PCHP child and his/her siblings to develop their language, literacy, numeracy and social and emotional skills.

This learning through play experience is designed to;

- Strengthen the natural bond between parent and child
- Encourage a love of learning
- Employ a non-directive approach
- Encourage the parent as the child’s first and best teacher
Prepare children for later success in school.

"The Parent Child Home Programme – an evidence-based early literacy, parenting, and school readiness model – is committed to closing the achievement gap by providing families with the skills and materials they need to prepare their children for school and life success."

Parent Child Home Programme, 2019.

Restorative Practice
Restorative practice is an approach to building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, resolving conflict and repairing damaged relationships. It provides a framework that can support a wide range of organisations and sectors, including schools, early years’ services, youth services, workplaces, communities and families – while complementing and supporting other approaches, such as coaching, mediation, and restorative justice.

The field of RP has been growing rapidly throughout Europe in recent years, with restorative processes being applied across many contexts. RP aims to build strong, happy communities and to manage conflict or tensions, by actively developing good relationships and resolving conflict in a healthy manner. The most critical function of RP is restoring and building relationships. Because restorative processes (whether informal or formal) foster the expression of emotion, they also foster emotional bonds. According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), and the work of Silvan Tomkins and Donald Nathanson, “human relationships are best and healthiest when there is free expression of affect or emotion – minimizing the negative, maximizing the positive, but allowing for free expression” (IIRP, 2013). Furthermore, it is through the mutual exchange of expressed emotional language that we build community; creating the emotional bonds that tie us all together (Nathanson, 1992).

“The term ‘restorative practice’ is used to mean a practice that is about nurturing, supporting and sustaining new shared relationships and structures, or bringing new life and energy to established relationships and structures.”

Dr. Derick Wilson, 2016.
Research Background

This project examines and assesses the literature and theoretical underpinnings relating to emotional literacy and intelligence, while also evaluating the home environment and parental involvement as important factors in children’s social and emotional development. Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) research on emotional intelligence, followed by Goleman’s explorations (1995), highlights that school-going children need support in social and emotional development – with the improvement of these skills essential for maintaining positive relationships. Studies show that without high levels of social and emotional functioning children are at risk to the social issues often-affecting marginalised communities e.g. education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (United Nation, 1995; Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenberg, Max Crowley, 2015; Ciarroiche, Dean & Anderson, 2000; O’ Malley, 2015). The Let’s Talk book encourages the development of these abilities, which in turn can lead to a more productive civic and personal life.

Research demonstrates a common link between parental participation and children’s educational achievement (Epstein, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2011; Feinstein & Symons, 1999). The relationship of utmost importance is the parent-child relationship. In fact, parental involvement and engagement with reading activities in the home environment has important positive outcomes on a child’s language, literacy skills and educational success (Bus, van IJzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, and Welsh, 2004).

Evidence also tells us that a supportive home environment is the foundation of, and a significant factor in, educational development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Porumbu & Necuoiu, 2013). For a child, the family home is their first educational setting, with the parent as their first and best teacher, with parent-child interactions being a key factor in educational accomplishment (Bruner, 1964; Hart & Risley, 1995; Vygotsky, 1962). Accordingly, it is evident in our preliminary research that using Let’s Talk as a parental tool to encourage emotional language could help support children’s health and well-being, and in turn improve their emotional intelligence.

Research Approach and Methodology

The key paradigm used in this study is an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm where the “researcher tends to rely upon the ‘participants’ views of the situation being studied”, using questionnaires as an approach to qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2003, p.8). The questionnaire uses both open and closed questions to collect the data and enrich the research findings. The qualitative data collection method used in this project is a self-completion, semi-structured questionnaire that contains seven questions. Guided by the National College of Ireland’s Ethics policy, a representative purposive/availability sample of 20 participants was chosen. For families invited to participate in the study two criteria needed to be met; participants’ primary language must be English, and, participants have completed at least 68 visits of the 92-visit programme.

1. Participants’ primary language must be English

Due to the diverse demographics of PCHP participants, the decision was made to only ask families where English is the primary language to complete the questionnaire, as to not put undue pressure on parents. However, under the principals of justice and
fairness, all families received the book as part of the PCHP programme – whether they participated in the study or not.

2. Participants have completed at least 68 visits of the 92-visit programme
The PCHP programme, on average, takes two years to complete – with full completion amounting to 92 home visits. During visits, the Home Visitor models and explains pedagogical strategies (encouragement, praise, scaffolding, questioning, co-constructing, and listening) and over time, parents generally begin to understand these strategies and how they are used to support their child’s educational needs. By the third quarter of the programme parents are in a better position to understand these strategies and their confidence in using them has grown. It is at this stage that Let’s Talk is introduced to the home. The researchers felt that for participants to recognise the importance of understanding and using emotional language with their children they would need to be at this stage of the programme, and in turn be able to comprehend and complete the questionnaire for the study. The qualitative data gathered from these questionnaires was then analysed using a thematic approach, giving a comprehensive account of participants’ experiences.

Preliminary Results and Recommendations
Central to Let’s Talk is the development of emotional literacy and the attitudes, knowledge, and expertise regarding key emotional skills;

- Recognising emotions in the self and others
- Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions
- Labelling emotional experiences with an accurate and diverse vocabulary, and
- Expressing and regulating emotions in ways that promote both intra- and interpersonal growth.

The emergent themes in relation to these skills and interpreted from the data received are presented under the following headings;

1. Parents’ comprehension of the book
2. A greater use of emotional language
3. Improved parent-child interactions

Parents’ Comprehension of the Book
Let’s Talk’s overall aim is to support parents to build their child’s emotional literacy. For the parent to use the book effectively, they need to be able to comprehend what the book is designed for and how it works. The objective is to;

- Support parents in naming and describing emotional language to their children
- Aid children in naming and expressing emotional language
- Familiarise children with emotive expressions
- Help children form an understanding of other people’s emotions and feelings
- Have fun while reading and learning.

From the analysis of the data there is a high indication that parents understand the concept and objectives of the book. Some of the comments from parents include:
“It teaches my children to notice different facial expressions and emotions”.

“It helped my child articulate just how they are feeling...made communicating about feelings easier”.

“I liked the book because it showed myself and my child different words to use for feelings”.

“My child sometimes struggles with communicating his emotions and seeing the pictures of each emotion helped him to understand”.

A Greater Use of Emotional Language
The overall concept of the book is to encourage a greater use of emotional language between parents and their children, with findings indicating an increased range of emotional language in use in the home. Observations include:

“I am conscious to explain the feelings and emotions I use now. I am using more words now after using the book”.

“Yes, we’ve started communicating better about how we feel”.

“This book helped me by increasing my range of feelings words that are commonly used in society…build her vocabulary and support her to understand and name the emotions to express herself”.

Parent-child Interactions
Encouraging parent-child verbal interactions (Bruner, 1964; Hart and Risley, 1995) is a key element of the research and a core component of both PCHP and RP. This theme is evident across all the questions answered. While using the book, parents are having conversations with their children with a focus on emotional language. There is a clear suggestion that these interactions are happening through play with both parent and child enjoying the dance of conversation.

“We’ve started communicating better about how we feel”.

“I used it with all my kids. They liked the photos and were copying the facial expressions and having lots of fun”.

“It was a great way to talk to my children about their emotions, I loved the real pictures”.

Sometimes children, and adults, need extra help in naming and understanding their feelings. Using a traffic light system, with different colours representing different feelings, is a simple way of identifying positive and negative emotions.

Each page of this book has a ‘main’ feelings word and a real-life image that shows that feeling. There are also three other words, to extend your child’s emotional vocabulary.
“He loved it. He sits and looks at the real pictures all the time. He smiles and says ‘happy’ and pretends to cry on the sad photo’.

“He really enjoyed looking at all the pictures and asking what is the boy/girl doing? Why are they making funny/sad faces?”.

**Overall Recommendations**
For the most part, feedback from participants is overwhelmingly positive – but even with positivity comes certain learning. Parent recommendations for improving the book are crucial to the research findings, with these recommendations vital to the success of the book and for any future editions. Using a plan, do, review participatory action research approach recommendations encompass both parent feedback and author reflections and learning.

**Parent Recommendations**
These recommendations come directly from survey responses and are listed under the following headings;

1. Language used
2. Supporting parents to scaffold conversations, and
3. Ensuring visual content is accessible for all readers.

*Language Used*
Parents comments in relation to the language used in the book include, “Maybe changing the word ‘negative’ at the beginning of the book”, and “I just didn’t like the term – negative feelings. It suggests that those feelings are not welcome”. On review, the book needs to be clearer in explaining that it is the range of emotions that evoke negative experiences, not that they are bad emotions for anyone to have (Rosenberg, 2015). Explaining that the meaning of the word ‘negative’ is connected to uncomfortable feelings that are felt when needs are not met might allay any misunderstandings around the phrase ‘negative’ emotions.

*Supporting parents to scaffold conversations*
Responses to the survey indicate that parents would benefit from “Maybe put[ting] some examples in the book of how to ask questions. You give it in a guidance sheet, but it would be good in the book”. Another comment suggests “add[ing] a small sentence in the book to further explain the word. For example, you can change the picture of the child to the child eating ice-cream and add a sentence ‘Adam is happy/glad because he got the ice-cream’”. Guided by recommendations there is a need to give clear and instructional examples of ‘start-up conversations’ for parents to model and practice with their children. This could be an additional page in an updated version of the book, as well as including a restructured guidance sheet.

*Ensuring visual content is accessible for all readers*
In response to questions regarding possible improvements to the book, parents suggest making some changes to the design of the book. One parent mentioned that on “Page 19 – the writing was hard to read”, while another said “Sometimes the colours of the words are hard to read, it would be good if they were brighter or one colour”. Feedback indicates some of the wording might be hard to read as it is printed
in different colours. In future editions, a balance in contrast between the text and background colour may be needed to improve the readability of the text.

**Further Learning**

From the researchers’ perspective, in reviewing both parents’ recommendations and their own as part of their plan, do, review process, several suggestions could be made.

To put a recommended age on the book and an explanation as to why the book can be used at any age. Some parents state that they consider the book to be ‘too old for their pre-school children’. However, research tells us that learning begins in the womb, with babies listening to language from their mothers (Kolata, 1984). It also tells us that reading to your child from an early age is related to the growth of language, literacy and reading skills that can foster their cognitive abilities (Bus et al., 1995).

If in the future there is a need to supply parents and educators (from outside the Parent Child Home Programme) with the book, the authors need to make sure that the next edition of the book is more accessible. At present, if a parent does not understand a word or concept in the book, they can ask their Home Visitor, but with the increased popularity of the book outside of PCHP, it needs to be clear and comprehensible to all.

Lastly, recommendations propose gathering a focus group of parents who have used the book before publication of the next edition. Although the qualitative data in the questionnaires was enriching, the researchers feel that some questions needed to be probed more and this was not possible with the method they used. A focus group would give yet more opportunity to gather relevant data and to tease out any questions that were unclear (Walliman, 2011).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, emotions play a significant part in our lives – they affect our relationships, our attentiveness to others, our learning, our memories, as well as our mental health (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In the present climate, where children’s influences are coming from video games and/or social media, the need for human interaction is now even more significant for development (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Developing emotional literacy skills and emotional intelligence abilities are critical for future success in not only their careers, but also their social lives (Fan & Chen, 2001). In children, these abilities can be nurtured through the medium of books, especially “in wordless or nearly wordless picture books, [where] images carry the primary task of emotional engagement” (Maria Nikolajeva, 2013, p.250). Parents can foster these skills in their children and help them to learn the emotional language needed to describe and understand feelings.

Parent-child interactions are a key factor in educational attainment (Porumba & Necuioib, 2013). It is essential that from birth the child has meaningful interactions with the parent in order to build attachment and a sense of belonging (Bowlby & Ainesworth, 1992). Parents need to teach children all aspects of emotional intelligence and children are never too young to start, it will build on their foundations of future successes of life and help them to build and maintain relationships throughout their lives.
This parental tool is made with parents and children in mind, and through participating in this study parents are directly involved in the process of evaluation as well supporting the development of any future editions of *Let’s Talk*. Consequently, as educators and researchers, it is vitally important to use action research processes such as plan, do and review (Holte, 2010). Gathering evidence through qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and using a participatory action research model, is not only good practice but essential for community and non-profit organisations to gain respect and validation in their communal area (Whyte, 1991).

The book is designed to support parents in the Parent Child Home Programme and restorative practitioners so that they have a greater understanding and use of emotional language. Since the launch of the book – and the growing interest in social and emotional development in children – other parents, educators and professionals across multiple domains are showing interest in using the book. Future plans include developing learning events and workshops for educators, professionals and parents, with the intention being to continue to support those raising and working with children in building better and healthier relationships. In turn, the vision is not only to help families talk about their feeling and emotions, but entire communities, and by doing this we can all build better, healthier relationships that will strengthen individuals and the communities they live in.

Lastly, to leave you with a Judith Colbert quote;

“When you give children skills and strategies for controlling their emotions, solving problems and relating to others in positive ways, you give them tools that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.”

(Early Childhood News, 2007, p.4)
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Diversity, Recognition and Dialogue: The voices of books and readers-listeners in the Intercultural Human Library

A summary of a paper presented at CARN Conference 2018 in the Symposium *Learning communities: knowledge ecologies and social mediation*

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Do you wanna hear a story? A story about a Boy from Brazil, that came from nowhere in a very poor town and that today, on this delightful day is presenting His research at Manchester, to be more precise at the Friends Meeting House. A place that has its own story… Built-in 1828 and serving since then as a place of peacebuilding and social justice.

2018 is a year to promote humans right, gender equality and to celebrate the difference! Today we can hear more and more the voices of the unheard and through education, we move forward to social cohesion every day more.

This paper is called Diversity, recognition and dialogue: The voices of books and readers-listeners in the Intercultural Human Library. This work is the result of an ongoing research-action project under a collaboration protocol between the Institute of Education of the University of Minho and the Municipality of Braga, Portugal.

Throughout our fact-finding, we found that Discrimination and Prejudice were the top priority of the city regarding the inclusion of immigrants. Our goals were then to understand the potential of mediation for the promotion of interculturality and to analyze new ways of promoting the inclusion of migrants in the city of Braga.

As an immigrant myself, this subject is also part of my story and I could talk about it without stopping. Instead, there are 4 important things to point out here today and to make sure you all understand what it is all about I’ll explain to you. Why Mediation? What is interculturality? What is the Human Library? And why do we need stories?
Why Mediation? As humans, one of our greatest gifts is our capacity to communicate as we do. Daniel Webster used to say that if all his possessions were taken but one, he would choose to keep the power to communicate because with that he could regain it all³.

We perceive Mediation as a process where we construct bridges allowing people to communicate efficiently and through that grow the seeds of mutual recognition, comprehension, positive ways of dealing with conflicts and leaving the tools for everyone to build their own bridges, to plant their own seeds. With that said, it is important to realize that in 2018 we live in a global world and more and more we need to learn how to behave as a global community. The intercultural concept comes into play when we understand that in a global world, communication can sometimes be seen as a dark cloud, an issue…

Interculturality cleans the sky with the concept that we no longer can live in a world built on the idea that we need to tolerate the different. The one that tolerates does not celebrate. Interculturality comes and teaches us that through the differences we can grow together, celebrating and promoting the difference between all the cultures in the world.

Costa (2015) said that in an intercultural world is necessary to create conditions that create the need in people to know each other and share a common goal. With that in mind, we came with the idea of adapting the Human Library concept into the intercultural realm with the main objectives of this intervention being to promote intercultural dialogue and to promote the recognition of different cultures.

The Human Library is a method of approaching storytellers with their reader-listeners with the intention of creating dialogue and interaction between them. Human books tell their stories and experiences of emigration and immigration, enhancing respect for

³ Retrieved from https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/66493-if-all-my-possessions-were-taken-from-me-with-one
human rights and stimulating mutual understanding and recognition. “The purpose of the Living Library is enabling short, intensive and facilitated contact between Readers and Books – offering those holding possible prejudices to meet the objects of their prejudice”. (Little, Nemutlu, Magic & Molnár, 2011, p.16). Research has shown that intergroup contact can significantly reduce harmful stereotypes and demonstrated that prejudice and contact are significantly and inversely correlated.

During our journey, one of the most important parts were finding and preparing the human books. The whole of the Mediator comes into play during this process. By using techniques like active listening and enhancing this moment of developing the book by its potential, we used an approach that while helping the Human books to create their stories we were also creating reflexions and celebrating their life path.

This Human Library had 4 books. Each one of them had a completely different story, each a universe to teach something to those who were listening. Here we ask ourselves. What are stories? Aren’t we all made of stories? Aren’t we all made of Human History? Aren’t we all the story that we tell ourselves every morning?
Thomas, Obst and Nolan suggest that “we care deeply, selflessly about those we know. But that empathy rarely extends beyond our line of sight” (Thomas, Obst & Nolan, 2014). So If I’m looking at you right now, I can see you, I can know you, the real you. Because of that, we took the Human Library into two different contexts. First at a Public Library and second at a public school. We had a total of 58 participants, 21 at the public library, with elders, adults and youth and at the public school, we had 37 teenagers with 22 on the 9th grade and 15 on the 12 grade. We also developed a questionnaire survey to gather qualitative information with the goal of answering the objectives of the project and finding out the potential of the Human Library.

Through those surveys we were able to take some conclusions that show us the potential of dialogue and the human library. Of 46 surveys, 44 said that stories told by the person itself through the human presence have more impact than other ways of telling a story. They pointed out the capacity of promoting empathy, facilitating the comprehension of the story and the capacity of keeping the attention of the reader-listener. When asked how they felt during the activity the participants said that it changed their perspective of life, they felt curious to know other cultures and empathy towards the human books. Regarding the educational side of this activity, the participants said that they learned that the world is full of different perspectives, we can learn with others, that it’s possible to deconstruct prejudice and how important the “other” is.

Regarding the human books, words as honour, gratitude and strong emotions are referenced many times. Through telling their stories and feeling the feedback they said that it is possible to overcome prejudice through communication. They felt Human and not immigrants, they felt the others saw them as humans too and for that only we can say it was helpful regarding mutual recognition.

The human library created bridges and planted seeds in the city of Braga. We hope to spread our voice, the immigrant voices. We need stories because we are nothing more than that, and through daring to find new ways of promoting peace we can tell each other brighter stories. So do you have a story to tell?
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Conference Reflections

Reflections on CARN 2018 from info@eari.ie: Questioning assumptions around what counts as best practice in research networks

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Eight members of the Network of Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI) presented at the CARN conference. NEARI is open to all educational researchers. We come together in face-to-face meeting three times a year to share our research stories. In addition to this, our online platform provides opportunities for critical engagement with ideas and the sharing of resources. You can find us on www.eari.ie.

Aoife Prendergast, (Limerick Institute of Technology) spoke on “Action research reflections on the unpredictable learning curve in social care practice education”. Dr Josephine Bleach, (National College of Ireland) took us through “10 years of voicing and valuing: daring and doing community action research”. To give voice and value to the lived professional experience of practicing teachers, Derbhile de Paor, (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick) told “A triple tale: The Pied Piper, The Wizard of Oz and the Emperor’s New Clothes”. Colette Saunders, (Institute of Technology Sligo) asked “How do I improve my practice as a volunteer activist supporting trade unionisation of Ireland’s early childhood care and education workforce?”

Drs Caitriona McDonagh, Bernie Sullivan, Mary Roche and Máirín Glenn (co-conveners NEARI) presented at CARN as part of our current research project into “Developing, sustaining and promoting NEARI as a collaborative research network for educational practitioners”. Our attendance was partly subsidised under the Teaching Council of Ireland’s John Coolahan 2018 bursary scheme. We hoped to share our own knowledge about NEARI and to learn at CARN how we might enhance our best practice in our research network

What we learned
The CARN conference, like NEARImeets, provided an active space for diverse research voices by encouraging educational discourse which influenced our own learning and the potential learning of others. We were reminded of, what we consider to be, the crucial role of dialogue as a key method, if not methodology, not only in research networks but also in the research process.

The concept of constructive friends was a key new idea we experienced at CARN. Constructive friends is the term coined in one of the discussion sessions to replace the somewhat contradictory term “critical friend”. A keynote presentation provided us with the visual representation of a constructive friend where the common area between the many definitions of “friend” and “critical” lie.

During the conference, we met many constructive friends. Our new CARN friends added new questions and new inspiration to our research. We learned the importance of professional conversations with people from a variety of disciplines, who are also researching their practice. We would have liked a little more emphasis on ‘articulating and interrogating our values in practice’ (McAteer 2013: 39). However, it was an
illuminating and empowering conference and we gained a better understanding and appreciation for relationships and the power dynamics in education.

An added bonus for attendees at the CARN conference was the organised peace walk to the scene of the Peterloo massacre of 1819 on Saturday afternoon.

Thank you for a very enjoyable, well-organised and truly informative conference

from Cuiriona, Mary, Bernie and Mairin
Reflections on CARN 2018

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Free of family and work commitments I embarked upon what felt like ‘a mini adventure’! CARN 2018 presented me with a much anticipated opportunity to present my research on an international platform and to do a bit of travelling along the way. Up to that point my research had felt very much like an exciting, exhilarating yet lonely journey weaving its way through the crevices and shadowy paths of my mind.

I was first introduced to the concept of Action Research (AR) in 2017 at the University of Limerick’s Winter School in Social Science Research Methods, not long after starting my MA by Research at the Institute of Technology Sligo, Ireland. My topic is Trade Unionisation of Ireland’s Early Years Workforce. The full title of which is: How do I improve my practice as a volunteer activist supporting Trade Unionisation of Ireland’s early years workforce. When I first learned about Action Research it felt a bit like a ‘eureka’ moment. I knew straight away that action research was the approach for me even if I wasn’t entirely sure how to go about making it happen!

As I developed my understanding of AR, my AR cycles evolved and developed sub cycles which in turn became an undertow, pulling me forward. To be honest the action research process has presented challenges along the way and still is. Not that it was difficult to grasp but more so along the lines of I couldn’t hide from myself. CARN 2018 added to that experience. It was like somebody had reached in and unfolded my mind. I could see before me clearly the path my AR was taking and I was able to share my experiences with like-minded people. To be able to do that meant so much. Thoughts and ideas pierced the shadows of my crumpled grey matter and like a brilliant sunrise illuminated my horizon, one I had been having difficulty seeing at times.

Prior to CARN 2018, I was learning more about AR through my own research and network meetings organised by a group of amazing, co-convenors of a network in Ireland called EARI. EARI supports action researchers from a variety of backgrounds. Before I met them, I was kind of wandering aimlessly. Now I consider this same network to be my critical friends.

The mighty ‘ship’ CARN 2018 was an excellent international platform to present my research at. I came away with a sense of being ‘anchored’. I came way feeling my research was real, valid and welcomed. Most importantly, CARN 2018 bestowed upon me a realisation that my AR project will make a difference. I just needed to step out of the shadows of my mind, take a deep breath and believe it. And with that my adventure continues… Transcribing interviews and thematic analysis beckon for the next few months. However, I now know I am where I am meant to be and that knowing will keep me motivated in the months ahead.

Namasté CARN 2018.
A note re: that attached photo. The first line is really what got my attention.

‘The Manchester Conference challenged the old thinking and distressed some’ …

The AR methodology for me challenges the status quo. I feel it compliments qualitative and quantitative. However, it also works equally well, as I am beginning to learn, as an approach in its own right in spite of challenges and dissenting voices that surface every now and again.
CARN Reflection

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Beginning with the provocations offered by the opening keynote panel, the CARN Conference 2018 personally served to highlight the role and impact of individuals’ contexts in collaborative action research. That is, it became apparent just how dependent the interpretation and enactment of collaborative action research are on the stakeholders involved (i.e. researchers, participants, readers), each with their own unique worldviews and identities.

Not unlike the diverse ways and means by which researchers executed and presented their work were the varied interpretations of that research by those who attended. Just as the presenting researchers had initially envisioned and designed their projects, those visions were then interpreted and coopted by their participants, often resulting in new realizations or changes in the researchers’ own conceptualizations. Several presenters emphasized their research conditions or perspectives of their participants as adding to, supporting, and/or challenging contemporary developments in action research.

In each of these circumstances, the researchers described different communicative spaces in which their participants interacted, as well as different definitions of and approaches to collaborative action research—all directly imposed or influenced by the context of their work. For instance, one presenter’s descriptions of performing collaborative action research with members of a somewhat fragile, organizational community looked and sounded much different than another participant who expressed working with participants in a more stable, institutional setting. Other presenters illustrated major international variations in education systems and how differently teachers collaboratively adopted and adapted to current reform. It was where and who researchers and participants were, as well as why and for whom they performed their work that created the basis for the constraints and criteria that were experienced, in turn affecting their assumptions, research design, and analyses.

Through making this realization, it became clear how important it is to situate our work as action researchers: not only in relation to ourselves and our participants (e.g. socially and culturally), but also both historically (e.g. locally and globally) and as connected with recognized ecologies of practice (e.g. paradigms of action research). Just as the keynote panel described the need to acknowledge ‘unwelcome truths’ associated with a given location or social setting, we each must engage reflexively with our own ‘truths’ while holding fast to the core tenets of action research. It is through this purposeful contextualization of our work that we can deeply appreciate and discern collaborative action research as an emancipatory, sustainable, and transportable vehicle for change and professional development, and furthermore gain a deeper understanding of its underlying mechanisms for transformation.
CARN Reflections
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I believe CARN is an empowering network for action researcher, and we are connected more than ever. Through this network, I have learned not to listen to people who tell me, ‘you can’t do it’. I have learned not to listen to people who tell me that, ‘action research is just about professional development’, because action research is not just about becoming a better teacher (in my case); it is about creating new knowledge and generating theory.

My third visit to the CARN conference was a memorable and enjoyable experience. It was memorable because I did my first workshop ever, on ‘Leveraging Video for Self-Reflection’ and I did manage to do it at CARN! It was so nerve-wrecking, but everybody said they enjoyed themselves during my session. The feedback I received was superb and I feel tremendously grateful.

It was also enjoyable because it was so nice to meet the CARN people, and it was lovely to meet new people who are passionate about action research. It was nice to interact with people with different backgrounds and engaged with their presentation of action research approaches in different settings. All in all, a very well organised conference with fantastic, thought-provoking and inspiring content and I would definitely attend again in the future!
Reflection on CARN Conference 2018

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I am a dancer who has taught Bharata-Natyam for over twenty years, mostly in the U.S., but also in India and England. Little girls come to class, giggle, grow and graduate. When my professor told me, “collaborative action research is what you are doing, Sumana!” it gave me pause. Indeed, I have grown (and continue to grow) in my understandings of my dance practice as a teacher. Yet, how can I, a dance teacher to a very small population, be an action researcher? Thinking about the young students I have taught, I notice that the same questions keep pushing to the fore. They have come to form the cord that I loop through my teaching experiences—my gems—as I find more beauty and responsibility with each new addition. Being so embedded in the process of stringing, I neglected to see the effects of it on my students and myself: confidence in their bodies and expressing themselves openly both within and outside the Indian diaspora, validation of making the art their own outside the fictitious boundaries of Hinduism, and learning that tradition is a strong foundation for innovation. I have been an unconscious collaborative action researcher.

So, last October, I found myself in Manchester strolling along Canal Street, shimmering and dappled with autumn leaves. I turned three corners to the circumference of the grand library and arrived at the Friends Meeting House—quiet, stately and welcoming—and the CARN Conference. Staff greetings, afternoon tea, and a room of warmth eased my anxiety and boosted my enthusiasm. I immediately connected to the ideas of “critical friendship,” an image of “infinity” rather than a ladder, and of the assertion that valuing understandings from our action research begins with us. These triggered new circuits in my own process while reinforcing others. The practical approach of Futures Workshops in the context of Critical Utopian Action Research also had a significant impact on my thinking, especially as I consider how teaching classical dance can affect perceptions of social justice both at the individual and the community levels. The most tangible gifts were the questions I received in response to my presentation: Do I consider my six-year-old student an action researcher? How do I view the knowledge passed from guru to disciple in classical dance? Further discussions in group sessions or on the steps outside the Meeting House were energizing. I could not wait to get back to work at Arizona State University.

The CARN conference sharpened my sense of the direction in which I wish to take my research. The infinity image flows powerfully here: The ancient Vedic invocation for a classroom has been made more deliberate in my research with my students, but the invocation itself helped instil the spirit of CARN in me as I grew up reciting and understanding it.

“May [Truth] protect us both.
May [Truth] nourish us both.
May we work together energetically and effectively.
May that which we study be filled with brilliance.
May there never be ill feeling between us.”
~Taittriya Upanishad, Yajur Veda
Speaking unwelcome truths to power

1862 Millworkers refused to use slave-picked cotton

1863 Abraham Lincoln thanked them for helping to end slavery