



Dimensions in the confluence of futures studies and action research

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Abstract

This article puts forward the proposition that the confluence of action research and futures studies can be seen across a number of domains: political, organisational, grassroots, global and individual. While this confluence embodies an heterogeneity of practices, it is their underlying approach, the processes used, which are shared. Identifying both the many distinctive practices in their unique contexts, and their more homogeneous processes is the primary task of this paper. Aspects of this confluence are explored as they relate to social change, empowerment, humanisation, ways of knowing and ethics.

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1. Personal context

To use the words of Zia Sardar, futures studies has both ‘inspired and disturbed me’ [30]. From vague intuitions and un-examined assumptions about the future, futures studies has helped me to clarify the dimensions of deep time change, the challenges we face as a planet, and the need for alternative futures. It has also propelled me to begin to look for concrete and practical answers to the dilemmas we face. With the realisation that we are living in an era of profound change and trauma has come a deep desire to empower myself and others in the face of a ‘global problematic’ and ‘civilisational crisis’.

The awakening I underwent can be described through David Hicks’ analysis of the psychological stages students undergo in courses on global futures. Hicks shows how students in courses on global futures undergo distinctive psychological changes: which proceed from *cognitive*, *affective*, *existential*, and *empowered*, to *action* [13] (p. 100). In this first stage I intellectualised the dimensions of global futures, which included learning concepts and ideas in the field, in particular the ‘global problematic’ and ‘civilisational crisis’. As my studies progressed frustration with the complexity of the issues, and sadness, worry, and anxiety over the state of the world and dystopic implications of this constituted the affective stage. This led me to radically re-assess my place (and time) on this

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precious planet. The assumptions I previously had about my own life were challenged and proved obstacles to my fuller development as a human being. This existential stage was a turning point, where I began to integrate my concerns about global futures into my life. This was much facilitated by Richard Slaughter's pedagogical approach which emphasised examining sources of inspiration, innovation and renewal, leading to an empowerment stage [36], as well as Sohail Inayatullah's emphasis on reconceptualising core narratives, myths and metaphors [15]. Reflecting the last stage in Hick's formula, action, I have begun to build into my life new relationships, networks, practices, behaviours and projects which address my concerns about global futures.

All in all the process has been a healing of my previous alienation from our world, its current state and futures. I needed to bridge my awakened knowledge about futures and the affective dissonance this provoked with the need to act upon this in an empowered way. An 'inner voice', intuition, and the guidance of colleagues, pointed me towards action learning and action research, as a process and approach that could help me bridge knowledge of futures with empowerment and action. This has led me to explore the confluence of futures studies and action research and apply these insights in practical settings. I have for several years now done research and experimented in this confluence of action research and futures studies. For most of this time literature research and practice have run in parallel. In both cases, my interest here began as an attempt to bridge the 'breadth and depth' of futures studies, and its profound value in conceptualising deep time change, with a desire to contribute to practical social change in a participatory and democratic way.

For the purposes of this article, I intend to give an overview of both the literature research and practice I have done. Both have led to an expanded awareness of what this emerging area looks like. Through this a typology of practices is offered that shows their contextual nature, and which points toward the underlying processes they share. The article concludes by examining the underlying processes that exist in this confluence, in particular in the area of social change, empowerment, humanisation, ways of knowing and ethics.

2. Organisation, methodology and epistemology

This explanation in the confluence of action research and futures studies is roughly organised as three parts, which in turn rest upon distinctive methods of knowing.

- (1) The first section is literature research on this confluence. This relies on 'programmed knowledge' that had emerged recently;
- (2) The second section covers my own experiences in practicing this confluence of action research and futures studies. This relies on the learning by doing approach characteristic of action research;
- (3) The third section hypothesises on the dimensions of this confluence, in effect expanding its definition. This rests upon Torbert and Reason's framework of action research, which distinguishes between 1st, 2nd and 3rd person practices [29] (xxv), as well as Maturana and Varela theory of 'ontology' [22] (p. 95);

2.1. What is action research?

Before entering into an explanation in the confluence of action research and futures studies, it is necessary to describe what action research is. While action research is a diverse

field, for the purposes of briefly explaining action research I outline five characteristics that these research practices often share. First, it is research aimed at generating practical being and action for human betterment. It also assumes that we know the world better through acting and experiencing in the world, and without such experience theory is impoverished [38] (p. 9). As such it often entails an attempt to make explicit what is tacit by reflecting upon the lived experience of people's lives. Theory is derived from practice. Secondly, it is participatory research processes that are inclusive of plural ways of knowing in the constitution of theory and practice [38] (p. 7). Knowledge is a process more than something fixed and universal, which is co-created through a diversity of perspectives and contexts. This does not imply a relativistic approach to knowledge, but rather a process of integrating perspectives through participatory interpretation. Third, it is iterative and heuristic, a continual process of evolving inquiry and action, by learning from reflections on successes and failures. This reflects the methodological dimensions of action research, the practices of which often follow processes such as: analysis/diagnosis, planning/visioning, acting/implementing, reflecting/evaluating. This proceeds in a spiral like pattern [40], where the cycle is repeated recursively, each cycle building on the last. Fourth, it is research by participants for participants, which addresses the fundamental question of 'research for who's benefit?' Research is for the learning, empowerment and capacitating of the stakeholders/participants who are the 'critical reference group' in the process. Fifth, it is research with a democratic ethos, which aims to critique power relations, address grievances of marginalised groups and achieve local empowerment in the face of entrenched institutionalised power. It is a research process that democratises knowledge and agency, toward a participatory influencing of social futures, encouraging 'political participation in collaborative action inquiry' [20] (p. 186).

Lincoln and Guba [20] provide an overview of the paradigmatic incongruities and confluences across the entire spectrum of social research. In their analysis action research is part of an emergent participatory research paradigm which differs substantively from previous traditions: positivist, post-positivist, critical and constructivist. At an ontological level it is characterised by 'participative reality—subjective—objective reality [is] co-created by mind and given cosmos' [20] (p. 168). At the level of epistemology it is 'critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experience, propositional and practical knowing [together with] co-created findings' [20] (p. 168). Action is then a pre-requisite to validity in the research process, and can even 'mandate training in political action' [20] (p. 172). Axiologically it is about 'balance of autonomy, cooperation and hierarchy in a culture' [20] (p. 172). Generally they show how this participatory research paradigm incorporates earlier critical and constructivist traditions, but is fundamentally at odds with positivist and post-positivist approaches. Reason and Bradbury on the other hand argue that action research can indeed incorporate previous research traditions, as a participative worldview allows us to 'draw on techniques and knowledge of positivist science and to frame these within a human context' [38] (p. 7).

2.2. *The synthesis of action research and futures studies*

When I originally documented emerging patterns in the confluence between action research and futures studies, I saw at the time an emerging approach to futures studies which was

promising, and how the two fields of work complimented each other [24]. This is summarised across eight points:

- Participation—important because futures work increasingly aims at capacity building in organisational or grassroots situations;
- Social change—while futures work primarily explores social change, action research aims at agency in the social change process;
- Knowledge creation—both fields have made significant advances and innovations in extending and demonstrating rigour, validity, in the creation of knowledge;
- Systems thinking—both have increasingly been informed by various schools of systems thinking, and share a systems intervention viewpoint;
- Complexity—both often share a participatory epistemology which acknowledges that there are far too many variables in any research endeavour to see a given situation completely, so that the way we see the world, our worldviews, filters, mental models, etc. will shape conclusions;
- Futures visions—while it is the vision that is often of primary concern in futures studies, action research also has incorporated visioning methods and frameworks;
- Democratic commitments—in futures studies this is seen through ‘Participatory futures praxis’ and experiments with anticipatory democracy, while in action research it is a ground of being;
- Social innovation—action research achieves this through practical experimentation and implementation, while futures studies does this through more abstract conceptualisation and communication processes.

I also found real examples where these two domains of work intersected. These approaches and practices, however, came by very different names, and did not necessarily acknowledge their apparent or genealogical similarities. This can be divided into three camps: (1) practices which consider themselves action research, but which incorporate tacit futures methods or thinking, (2) practices which consider themselves futures studies or research, but which incorporate tacit action research/learning, and (3) those practices which consciously and explicitly incorporate the two (Fig. 1).

Action research incorporating tacit futures thinking	Futures studies incorporating tacit participatory – action	Conscious and explicit incorporation of the two
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Appreciative Inquiry – David Cooperrider o Future Search – Janoff and Weisbord o Action Inquiry – William Torbert o Community action research and organisational visioning – Peter Senge o Total Systems Intervention – Robert Flood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o ‘Participatory futures praxis’ as described by Wendell Bell o Future Workshops – Robert Jungk o Electronic Town Meeting – Jim Dator o Anticipatory Democracy – Clem Bezold o Participatory futures – Wendy Shultz o Action oriented FS – Erzsébet Nováky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Anticipatory Action Learning – Sohail Inayatullah, Tony Stevenson, Paul Wildman, Robert Burke o Oliver Markley – proposed ‘political action futures research’ o Authors in FUTURES special issues on action research – Dennis List, Patricia Kelly, Hayward and Voros

Fig. 1. Three camps in the confluence of action research and futures studies.

2.3. Exemplary synthesis

Anticipatory action learning has been the name of the practice which has incorporated these two fields most explicitly. While other practices may have incorporated these disciplines and their influences tacitly, anticipatory action learning has emerged from the work of a number of practitioners originating in Australia, for example Robert Burke, Tony Stevenson, Paul Wildman and Sohail Inayatullah, to name a few. This term was first seen in Julie Macken's, 'New learning curve sends planners back to the future' [21]. Inayatullah has thus far provided the most comprehensive and self-conscious synthesis of action learning and futures studies through his book *Questioning the future: futures studies, ways of knowing and organisational transformation*. In this he characterises anticipatory action learning as such [16] (p. 204):

- The goal is to create alternatives by questioning the future;
- Objective and subjective are both true;
- Interaction between meanings and actions are the most crucial;
- Language is constituted through creating communities of meaning and doing;
- The future is not fixed but continuously being revisited;
- Reality is process-based;
- Learning is based on programmed knowledge and questioning [the future] plus ways of knowing;
- Learning from doing, from experimentation;
- Participation—asking all participants how they see the future;
- Research agenda is developed with respondents—the future is mutually defined;

Does this, however, really differ from 'participatory futures praxis'? It is important to note that such practices are not entirely new. Even before Inayatullah charted the shift in futures studies from predictive to participatory approaches [14] together with the emergent use of action learning [17] participatory and action oriented futures studies had been pioneered through the work of many in the futures field. Wendell Bell calls this tradition 'participatory futures praxis' [3] (p. 298), the definition of which in many respects encapsulated the underlying features of this 'new' action research and futures confluence. For example, Bell characterised it as both participatory, toward democratising the process of futures thinking, and action oriented, to serve as catalyst for change. Examples include participatory projects under the direction of Professor James Dator at the Manoa School of Futures Studies and the Honolulu Electronic Town Meeting (ETM) [3] (p. 94), the Norwegian Alternative Futures Project, and Robert Jungk's Future Workshops [3] (p. 300). To this can be added the early work through the Oslo Futures Conference and Mankind 2000,¹ as well as the work of Schultz [31], Bezold [4], and Slaughter [35,34]. Finally, Bell also uses participatory action research (PAR), one of the biggest 'schools' in the action research field, as a prime example of this participatory futures praxis. In this case, even a practice that does not explicitly recognise itself as part of the futures field is included, because the qualities of the practice merit this [3] (p. 299).

Advancing Futures [9], which documents the practice of dozens of teachers of futures at the tertiary level over decades, also reveals an experiential–experimental tradition that runs through the work of many of the futures educators in the book. These in many respects parallel action

¹ Jim Dator was one of those involved in these activities—and provided this information.

learning and action research approaches. Most notable is Oliver Markley's [7] call for futures work that incorporates action research in a political change process, informed from his work at the Stanford Research Institute. He found that authentic long-term futures exploration was distinctly at odds with the political election cycle and the short term-ism this generates. He concluded that there was a 'need to couple social action research with futures research and political activism' [7] (p. 339). There are other examples, such as Sam Cole's 'Heuristic model' for global scenario exploration [7] (p. 243–250).

Taking nothing away from the early pioneers of participatory futures praxis, this paper is primarily aimed at specifically exploring the more recent confluence of action research/learning and futures studies. While participatory futures praxis in many respects parallels this newer body of practices, they are different. Even though older action–participation futures praxis share characteristic and can be regarded as the basis of the emerging action research-informed tradition, this new action research/learning addition to futures studies adds a new layer which is also genealogically distinct.

3. Learning experiences

Following Maturana's statement that 'all doing is knowing and all knowing is doing' [22] (p. 27), I here provide an overview of the projects that I have been involved with over the last few years. Over this period of studying, documenting and conceptualising on the confluence of action research and futures studies, I also had the opportunity to implement some of these ideas, with varying degrees of success and failure. I describe four examples I have been part of to provide an overview. They are not intended as rigorous analysis of the projects themselves, but rather as a way of opening up the dimensions in the confluence of action research and futures studies through my personal experience.

3.1. *Univator—strategic innovation for sustainability*

The Univator program was initially conceived of by Adam Leggett, a Melbourne based consultant of sustainability related problems in business and industry. Its aim was to develop a platform through which second year science students could find practical expression of their growing knowledge of science toward conceptualising and developing innovations that addressed sustainability issues. I was brought in to co-develop and co-implement a pilot program in 2001 at Melbourne University, which would run for 8 weeks. Advertisements were put up around the campus, which initially generated eight participants, six of which finished the program.

We used a project-based action learning approach [41], aimed at facilitating experiential learning for teams. The set up fundamentally shifted expectations as those involved were no longer 'students', but rather 'participants', and they were not there to passively learn, but to develop projects and initiatives. This was initially disorienting for the participants, and to myself as well! They, or I, had rarely if ever been in a space where it was up to them (and us) to create projects and innovations. Programmed knowledge, however, was still very important, as the participants were exposed to concepts and thinking in the area of innovation, enterprise, futures studies, systems thinking, and social change. In addition, various futures methods were used to help facilitate learning. Group environmental scanning was used to help participants begin to explore emerging issues. From here, participants did visioning on 'ideas whose time has come.' As projects developed, backcasting was used to clarify implementation strategies.

Values clarification was used on a number of occasions, which helped us get centred on what is important and meaningful. While the participants themselves gave a very favourable review of the program, in the end we lost the political battle in the department we were working in. On a positive note one participant started a bio-diesel business that continues to this day.

3.2. *Questacon—linking foresight, innovation and entrepreneurship*

The Questacon ‘Invention Convention’ was initially conceived of by Allan O’Connor together with the Questacon of The National Science and Technology Centre in Canberra, Australia. It aimed to help in the development and delivery of a 5-day youth enterprise conference. It was designed to provide youth from rural Australian communities the opportunity to combine and share experiences and ideas about science and technology and to gain practical skills in developing new business enterprise initiatives. I was brought in to co-develop and co-deliver the conference based on my knowledge of action learning and futures studies.

Our primary aim was to empower and enable the young participants through a process of capacity building. We did not want to lecture and talk down to ‘students’, in effect pacifying them. Rather we aimed to shift the locus of control to them, by challenging them to develop forward views, ideate innovations, and design ventures during the conference. The 15 or so participants were challenged over 5 days to develop forward views, of probable and preferred futures, and in this context develop innovations (an ideation process), and to ground these lofty ideas into business plans. These business plans were then presented to a group of bona fide entrepreneurs, who were there in a mentoring capacity to provide expertise and encouragement. This group learning was complemented by more personally relevant journaling by participants during off time. There was also an emphasis on reflecting on values, both in the sense of human value systems (perspectives) and on creation of value through an innovation process. The inclusion of foresight processes into the conference had the effect of turning ordinary business ventures with narrow value into social ventures with broader and more long-term value [28].

3.3. *World Social Forum—‘another world is possible!’*

The World Social Forum was initially created by a coalition of anti-globalisation activists and radical scholars, who felt that, while there were forums for elites to plan the future of the world economy such as at the World Economic Forum in Davos, there was no platform for popular participation in creating sustainable, socially just and peaceful futures of globalisation that included the concerns of civil society. It is a yearly open space event that has become an ongoing process of networking, dialoguing and collective action to address various local–global crises. Somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 people participated in the event in 2004.

The decision to participate was based on a strong sense that we as a planet are facing a crisis which is of ethical, social, ecological and of global dimensions and that runaway economic globalisation is exacerbating the problem. Many have expressed a need for alternatives to economic globalisation, beyond critique—alternatives that address and solve these problems. There is also a sense, however, that many of the alternatives and visions emerging in civil society are at odds with each other; and therefore a need existed to begin to tease out, synthesise or discard alternatives in the search for a more sustainable and just world. Working through a local Melbourne Co-operative—Borderlands—I was to go to Mumbai to help them link with wider global civil society organisations at the forum, document the alternatives being proposed there, do a workshop on bringing together alternative visions, and to network [27].

3.4. Desert Uplands

A process was initiated by the Desert Upland's Build Up and Development Strategy Committee, to address the serious issue of land management and sustainability in the Desert Uplands (DUs), on the high plateaus of central Queensland in Australia. DU had been subject to land degradation through overgrazing, in the past from sheep, and currently with cattle. Gerry Roberts, a career action researcher in rural development, brought together a diverse group of local landholders and other professionals to co-develop an action research project to address this issue. This included a number of local landholders, an environmental scientist, a soil expert, a natural resource management expert, a social researcher, an extension expert, an expert in behavioural change, a clinical psychiatrist and myself: the practitioner of futures studies. Using the experiential learning process developed by David Kolb [19], our task was to pull together our various perspectives on the issue, and develop an action plan for the research to be conducted. This project is on-going.

4. Levels of practices and their corresponding contexts

These four aforementioned projects are examples of the various levels at which such action research/learning projects can operate. Reason, Bradbury and Torbert distinguish between different levels in an action research process: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person Action Research [29] (xxv). These distinctions help to clarify the dimensions in which the confluence of action research and futures is taking place. First person action research is inquiry into one's own life, in order to act with more awareness. This may involve a number of practices, such as journaling, meditation, silence, 'presencing' or other. It centres around the subjective experience and agency of the individual, and the fostering of critical subjectivity. Second person action research is community or organisation based, happening in 'face-to-face inquiry' and 'interpersonal dialogue' [29] (xxvi). This aims at improving mutual understanding to improve our personal and professional practice and toward collective action and innovation. Third person action research links groups and individuals with wider 'political events' that are more impersonal in nature, and where it is impossible to meet everyone face-to-face. This can happen in large organisations (i.e. government departments) or through networks of groups. They argue that a successful action research process will incorporate all three levels [29] (xxvi).

Expanding this distinction between 1st, 2nd and 3rd person action research, my experience in the futures studies field suggests that there are various distinctive contexts where practices that incorporate this confluence of action research/learning and futures exist. I put forward here a typology of practices based on Reason, Bradbury and Torbert's categories, which in turn are found in quite different contexts, and which lead to different outcomes. While variations exist, this is an attempt to generalise the various practices.

4.1. First person

Transpersonal. This is the individual's subjective and experiential process and incorporation of these themes. The process is of individual reflection, through peer or mentor discussions, meditation, journaling or other. It is also the process of one's life journey, through their personal experiences, human interaction, and experimentation. The outcome is a heightened sensitivity toward others, and social/global emerging issues, as well as an expanded view of one's role in the world, and personal responsibility for future generations. Senge and Scharmer, for example

call this inner process ‘presencing’, considering it an essential pre-condition for wider social change [33] (p. 246). Csikszentmihali’s *The evolving self* [8] calls for a future oriented self-reflective practice. Torbert [38] also considers subject oriented work the foundation for any meaningful inter-subjective process. The life stories of Richard Slaughter and Sohail Inayatullah also reflect this process of transpersonal development [25].

Educational. In an education process that brings together action learning/research and futures studies, learning happens through in-class experiments, games, simulations, or out-of-class implementation projects. Learning can happen for the teacher, who reflects on his or her own practice, or student, who reflects on his or her learning process. The outcome of this type of practice is often a more profound educational experience that goes beyond cognitive learning, creating a shift in consciousness and behaviour through student–teacher insight and role-switching. David Hick’s emphasis on individual journaling together with peer group discussion is an example of this [13] (p. 104).

4.2. *Second person*

Community. In a community process that incorporates these themes, local stakeholders are brought together with experts to address local and regional emerging issues. This is often done through meetings, workshops and conferences. The outcome is to address or solve complex social issues through collective action and innovation. This often uses large group processes and search conferences, for example Sandra Janoff and Marvin Weisbord’s Futures Search process [18].

Organisational. This approach has been used within particular companies, organisations or institution in the context of their distinctive purposes and goals. This is often conducted using outside consultants and facilitators who then work with a part of the organisation. The outcome can be strategic re-alignment, product/service innovation, or developing a learning organisation (or a more ‘foresightful’ organisation). Examples include Peter Senge’s organisational visioning process [32], and the work of systems interventionist Robert Flood [10].

4.3. *Third person*

Inter-organisational. Networks of organisations, businesses along with government departments have conducted future oriented research to better inform policy making. While much of this has been expert driven, examples exist where action research processes have been put in place. Michael Carley and Ian Cristie [6] described these as ‘action centred networks’, which use action research strategies to solve complex sustainability dilemmas. Godet’s triangulation of anticipation (future awareness), action (strategic resolve) and mobilisation (partnership) is used to describe the process [6] (p. 180). This collaborative model of institutionally based futures research can work across various government departments, universities and industry to develop knowledge about futures and to energise the process of social change.

Sub-political. Ulrich Beck’s notion of sub-politics [1] (p. 37, 91) is used here, to describe the creative-reaction of civil society to the ‘world risk society’ that has emerged through modern technocracy. Because technocracy has failed to steer nation-state and globe toward sustainable or acceptable paths, and has instead led to a globalisation of ever increasing ‘manufactured uncertainties’, civil society (the sub political) has creatively reacted by self-organising into political and communicative forces that can lead the rest of society: industry and government.

The process takes place through forums, workshops and informally across formerly disparate sectors of civil society. The outcome is to steer public policy through public opinion and the raising of awareness. The World Social Forum, for example takes from the tradition of open space developed by Harrison Owen [23], however, with vastly more participants making it open space events within open space events, and adding a utopian/visionary dimension, in the proclamation that ‘another world is possible!’ In addition, like action research, it refines and evolves its methodology on a year-by-year iterative basis.

5. Context and practice

From this list one can observe that there is no standard or readily identifiable single practice that can be identified as a ‘true’ convergence of action research and futures studies. Rather what we see are dissimilar practices that employ a confluence of processes from both fields or their wider domains. Each practitioner or practice will tend to modify their approach and the processes employed depending on the given circumstance and environment. Context is key. Given the endless heterogeneity of the world, practices adapt depending on the special needs they aim to address. Maturana’s concept of ‘ontogeny’ fits here [22] (p. 95). Ontogeny is the history of being for any self-organising (auto-poetic) system, the sequence or stages in their becoming. Because self-organising systems each have unique circumstances and adaptive pressures, each will find unique responses that are both instrumental and conceptual. Maturana and Varela [22] (p. 29) state that ‘Knowing is effective action, that is, operating effectively in the domain of the existence of living beings.’ Each practice has a unique ontogeny—which can include conceptual and theoretical elements as well as practical elements. For example, the application of futures studies or foresight in the world is heterogeneous, differing by country, circumstance, and role: be this educator, consultant, or activist. Nevertheless we can say there is sufficient self-recognition among people around the world to comprise the meta-category of futures studies. As mammals can be said to belong to the same animal kingdom, even while mice and elephants differ physiologically to a great extent, the argument here is that there is an emergent stream of futures practitioners incorporating action research and *visa versa*, which can be recognised as applying similar processes through very dissimilar practices in their respective and unique circumstances and contexts.

5.1. *The future as ‘principle of present action’*

Slaughter has argued that ‘the future is a principle of present action’, and that ‘the future’ is a cognitive phenomenon more closely associated with the evolutionary and psychological development of foresight [37] (p. 186). Thus, foresight should inform action and decision-making today. Futures studies has generally pushed past deterministic views of the future, toward a view that the future is plural ‘futures’ and that it is co-created. There is a tacit understanding that social change is not just what happens to us (structure), but that we also collectively constitute social change (agency). Even so, futures studies has traditionally leaned toward exploring the patterns and processes of social change and the imagining of alternative futures. The action research approach, on the other hand, is an exercise of agency—in consciously shaping the futures we want to live in. These emerging practices embody this ‘future as principle of present action’, and bring together these two versions of social change. In these, the exploration of alternative futures, which is the mainstay of futures studies, becomes part of and informs a lateral process of agency in the constitution of the futures we envision. Giddens’

[12] theory of structuration encapsulates this ‘duality of structure’, which describes both the interplay of agency, systems and structures. Giddens incorporates functionalist perspectives on social systems, structuralist perspectives on deep scripts, and the psychological and phenomenological schools which lean toward the power of human agency. It is in this context of a new view of social change where action research becomes more relevant to futures studies, as a research methodology that explicitly aims for progressive social change, not simply its exploration.

5.2. Validity as empowerment and capacitating

In addition these practices generally aim toward empowerment and capacitating. If the question is: ‘what is more valuable, knowing ‘the future’, or building the human capacity to think about the future in a critically empowered way?’, these practices lean toward the latter. If we accept that we cannot know ‘the future’, or even that ‘the future’ does not exist ‘out there’, but is rather an expression of human consciousness, then it follows that futures studies should not be judged for its efficacy in knowing the future, but rather judged for its efficacy in facilitating the capacity for foresight among people. With this new criteria, we shift focus from futures research experts who create content toward participant or student centred processes that facilitate the development of foresight capacity. In sharp contrast to the binary logic of prediction, such a capacity building approach only fails when it stops evolving and improving. These practices reflect this criteria for validity, the endeavours of which show a re-orientation towards satisfying subjective and inter-subjective needs.

5.3. Humanisation: toward whole people

These practices share a commitment toward creating more whole human beings. They lead to people who have expanded time dimensions and a sense of the profoundness of change, while simultaneously greater capacity to engage in change processes in the here and now with others. Such practices move past just the cognitive, and include: learning about how people ‘worldview’ the future different; how to communicate futures related issues more effectively; how to build common ground toward shared futures; integrating disparate knowledge and fields to address complex problems or emerging issues; greater self-knowledge and relationship knowledge. This more closely resembles a broader view of human development, such as that pioneered through Gardner’s well-known research on multiple intelligences [11], which identifies 8+ lines of development, and Wilber’s work on developmental streams of human personality, which include cognitive, moral, interpersonal, spiritual and affective, for example. [42] (p. 30).

5.4. Integrating knowledge systems

Because action research practices bring together a wide variety of stakeholders or participants, often with disparate views, foresight processes that incorporate this will bring together people’s perceptions, disciplinary episteme, and the cultural worldview from which people are profoundly situated. It might be said that such an approach creates an immense challenge in bringing different views together toward common goals. Such an approach to futures, therefore, is increasingly accompanied by ways of integrating various actors and their views on issues toward mutually satisfying ends. Different practices have different frameworks to facilitate this integration. The anticipatory action learning of Inayatullah modifies Revans’

framework (Learning = Programmed Knowledge + Questioning) into (Learning = Programmed Knowledge + Questioning the future + Ways of Knowing). Thus expert and book knowledge is honoured and included in a participatory exploration of futures and the ways of knowing these rest upon [5]. Senge and Scharmer's model for community action research, distinguishes between theoretical knowledge, methodological knowledge, and practical knowledge, and also between 'interior' and 'exterior' knowing [33]. This is an excellent framework for integrating the worlds of the academy, consultants and organisations, which often suffer from dissociation. Finally, Future Search [18] aims to build common ground between diverse stakeholders through a process of collaborative soul searching and exploration of global change, which then leads to collective action. An action research approach to futures accompanied by an appropriate integrating process is thus a way to create shared futures and solve complex problems that otherwise would be too daunting and difficult.

5.5. *Process ethics*

The notion of ethics within these practices does not as much appear as abstract principles in which to follow, or as professional ethics (although these are still important), but more as a process of spontaneous and enacted ethics manifested in our day-to-day interactions in the world. This is most succinctly summarised in Varela's [39] exposition of ethical know-how, which explains the distinction between ethics as an abstract set of deliberations, formulations, rules, and ethics as a field of reflective interactivity. In this sense the practices described follow a process by which ethical actions continuously evolve depending on the context of foresight. As our awareness of futures issues expand and change, it adds new dimensions to our responsibility in the present. This does not mean that creating an abstract and fixed set of rules is not useful, or that we should embrace an ethical relativism based on one's subjectification of 'the future'. Bell's argument for a futures ethics, based on universal categories, is well grounded in the global context, and in the predicament of the 21st century [2]. It does shift emphasis, however, toward an enacted ethics informed by foresight, rather than a mental activity of formulating abstractions, rules, and principles. In addition, ethics in many of these practices leans toward the co-creation of shared futures, insofar as such practices are about integrating the diverse ways of knowing of stakeholders into mutually meaningful action. The ethical thrust is towards higher modes of self-cognition (auto-poiesis) and self-organisation. Varela and Maturana call an emergent group's capacity for self-reflection and re-conceptualisation 'linguallaxis', a higher order type of languaging that translates into new ways of being, and higher forms of social organisation [22] (p. 211). They write, 'we have only the world that we bring forth with others, and only love helps us bring it forth' [22] (p. 248). Ethics here is the acknowledgement and legitimacy of the Other, diverse ways of knowing and ways of being that can lead to shared futures of co-existence. The use of Causal Layered Analysis in action learning can be seen as such process ethics, an exploration of ways of knowing and a deconstruction of the categories of self/Other that leads toward more mutually empowering categories, narratives and action [26].

5.6. *Conclusion*

Concluding with Hicks' explanation of his teaching of global futures, the confluence of futures studies and action research, or more broadly foresight embodied in action, is not just a process of being sensitised to pressing global issues, but more fundamentally a healing of our

alienation from the world and our futures. Foresight-full action, what could also be termed ‘action foresight’, is a movement toward healing our brightening spirits in the dance of co-creating our common and not so common futures.

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