

Ian Hughes

Why do you choose to do action research? What brought you to this practice? What keeps you involved? Do you have particular stories that illustrate why you practice action research? What issues, values, experiences, personal characteristics or other factors underlie your commitment to action research and shape your practice?

I choose action research because I have a long standing commitment developing more effective strategies and methods to promote social justice. I believe that using unjust methods and unequal relationships to promote justice and equality will not work (just as violence will not create harmony, and war will not bring peace). Therefore, I look for processes of acting, learning and researching that empower the powerless, inform the ignorant and produce good effects.

I am strongly attracted by the explicit commitment to action and reflection as complimentary parts of a whole.

I was brought to the practice of action research by Indigenous elders in Arnhem Land, while I was employed by them as a community development worker. Working with traditional Aboriginal communities, I learned about Ganma as an Indigenous Australian form of action research. I learned from Aboriginal theorists by walking country, watching dance and listening to stories. In this non-Western culture, free of the Cartesian split, I learned about Indigenous practices of community making, and especially about the practice of systems thinking.

Action research appeals to my ethical position. This way of doing research can be non-exploitive, and can bring direct benefits to participants. I continue to work in this mode for many reasons. One is that I can introduce humanising and cooperative practices into a Faculty dominated by competitive self-interest and biomedical research. I find that action researchers are a friendly and supportive community. When I was the only action researcher in a hostile environment ARLIST provided support, stimulation and validation.

The prestige and position of health professionals and academics in Australia rests directly and indirectly on exploitation of the environment and Indigenous people. In Australia the professions and academies systematically ignore the oldest continuing intellectual tradition in the world. This intellectual 'terra nullius' parallels the theft of land. Establishing action research and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing as a 'respectable' part of the academy is a small contribution to reconciliation, and reversing the colonial heritage.

Internationally, the Third World carries 80% of the world's burden of disease and received 10% of the world's health research budget. Most health research concentrates on extending the lives of those who are already privileged, while

ignoring those in greatest need. In Africa, action research places the researcher in the research situation.

In summary, I choose action research because I believe in old fashioned virtues like compassion and truth. I know this sounds corny, but it is real.

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