Lifelong Action Learning and Research
A Tribute to the Life and Pioneering Work of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt

Judith Kearney and Maureen Todhunter (Eds)
Griffith University, Australia

This tribute to Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt is a celebratory Festschrift of her learning/research action-packed life. Colleagues around the world reflect on their own learning, research and professional development, with and through Ortrun, in action learning and action research (ALAR).

Four Parts identify focus areas in Ortrun’s work and interests over the last 40 years. Higher Education is the site for most of Ortrun’s work experience since 1974 when she joined Griffith University in Australia. Organisations is a context where Ortrun has actively explored processes of learning, leadership and development in management education. Communities of Practice characterise Ortrun’s work throughout her career, particularly through participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) in communities. Futures focusses Ortrun’s recent writing advocating for PALAR as a flexible and effective methodology for responding to rapid change.

Here we see why Ortrun is a quintessential international scholar. And an ALAR practitioner/advocate. Her world view, understandings of knowledge and personal qualities naturally orient her along this path of inclusive, purposeful action. This is why Ortrun is a vital energy in shaping the evolution of the ‘Action’ family of scholarship, now including PALAR and LAL (Lifelong Action Learning). No wonder her life and pioneering work are an adventure story – not just of learning and research, but also of passion and action. This tribute opens windows onto that story.
Lifelong Action Learning and Research

A Tribute to the Life and Pioneering Work of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt
A single spark can start a prairie fire.

This Chinese proverb captures the essence of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt’s understanding of life and learning, reflection and action, research and publication. The cover painting by Wolfram Achenbach, Ortrun’s beloved brother, captures this understanding beautifully. A highly respected medical specialist in Germany, Wolfram came into painting later in life. He enjoyed Australian summers at Ortun’s Bribie Island getaway near Brisbane, where thoughts of Australian nature – in this painting, the typical bushfire – would flow through his brush. Today, sparks of constructive thought and action shape the lives of many people touched by Ortrun’s contagious enthusiasm for building a better world.
Lifelong Action Learning and Research

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CARSTEN ZUBER

FOREWORD

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt is my mother. When her long time colleagues, collaborators and friends, Judith Kearney and Maureen Todhunter, told me about their then covert plans for this Festschrift project, I felt grateful and thrilled at such a recognition of her life’s work and deeply touched to be asked to write the foreword.

As a loving son, I view Mum’s work through a lens that is in no way objective or dispassionate. It is, however, a unique perspective, which I hope will add a very personal layer to the fabric of this publication.

My mother is the product of a traditional, protestant German family. Her father was in many ways the stereotypical headmaster of the day – a strict yet loving family patriarch whom she revered. Her mother was a professional homemaker (in every sense of the term) whose life revolved around her husband and children, and whose energy, resourcefulness and perseverance enabled her to singlehandedly provide for Mum and her two siblings for almost a decade, during and immediately after WW2 while my grandfather was a PoW. Mum inherited these qualities in large doses, serving her well professionally and personally.

Two other family members also left a defining influence on Mum’s character and psyche. They are her ‘onkel Frieda’, a benevolent uncle with whom she spent much time as a young girl and whose encouragement, sense of fun and generous nature left a deep impression. And her brother Wolfram, a mischievous child who developed into a highly successful oncologist and haematologist, an extraordinary, larger than life character with whom she shared a deep, loving and extraordinary bond. His life was cut short by motor neurone disease, a tragedy lessened only for the fact he left a beautiful son Ulf, who is also adored by Mum. It is entirely fitting that Wolfram’s painting (a hobby he developed as an adult) adorns the cover of this book.

Mum’s work is often described as pioneering and this descriptor extends to her life more broadly. It is difficult today to imagine what it meant, in 1971, for a single working mother to emigrate from Germany to the other side of the world. The courage to leave the security of a tenured teaching job in Germany and the support structure associated with a large and loving (though not always harmonious) family cannot be overstated. Consistent with perceptions prevailing at the time, when my grandparents farewelled their daughter at Frankfurt airport in 1971 they imagined Australia to be a land of creepy crawlies and bush, of towns where kangaroos roamed the streets. Air travel was the domain of the wealthy and moving overseas was a one way journey. They thought they would never see their daughter or grandson again.
Of course, Mum saw the opportunity, the freedom and the lifestyle that this young and vibrant society could provide and threw herself into building our new life with a passion that only migrants can truly appreciate. She worked so hard to make sure I retained German language skills and every year she managed to send me back to Germany at Christmas time to ensure that familial and cultural bonds remained intact. This loving and generous act, for which I am forever grateful, was expensive (air travel in the 1970s was significantly more expensive than today, in relative terms) and required significant sacrifice over the course of the year.

Aside from the gift of a fierce intellect, a number of character traits enabled her to succeed in those early days and endure to this day. The first is her work ethic. Mum has always worked hard. Really hard. In those early days in Australia this was a differentiator that helped her to advance her career – even in the face of discriminatory conduct that today would be regarded as unacceptable. A good insight into the work ethic, principle and single minded persistence that enabled a divorced migrant woman with a strong German accent to overcome adversity in the mid-1970s lies in the way she dealt with the first (and by no means last) major obstacle in her career. Even with a solid teaching, research and publication record and a recently completed PhD under her belt, she was denied a promotion that merit-based criteria dictated was not simply deserved but well overdue. Moreover, it was made clear to her that she would not be considered for promotion in the future. Mum’s response – after picking herself up from the canvas – was to complete a second PhD and to continue publishing extensively, until it became impossible to deny her the promotion. I cite this as one of the many examples of her indefatigable and optimistic spirit.

Despite the time, energy and commitment Mum devoted to her own and others’ career development, as a young son I always felt loved, included and cared for deeply. I knew Mum was always there for me when I needed her. I’m still not sure how she managed that.

The work ethic, persistence, determination, optimism and energy I have identified here are shared by almost all successful leaders in every walk of life. But other values that shape Mum’s life profoundly as an academic, a citizen, a community member and friend are a little more rare and elude many successful people. These are fairness, kindness and generosity.

The philosophy with which Mum has approached interaction with others is encapsulated neatly in the adage of keeping a hard head and a soft heart. Of course, no-one achieves this ideal all the time. But I believe it best describes the way she has lived her life and the example she has set.

In the mid-1980s my mother first discovered the work of Reg Revans and other early pioneers of Action Learning. She felt an intrinsic alignment with this approach to learning – and its broader underpinning philosophy – and this inspired both a pivotal time in her career and a transformational moment for her personally. Action Learning lit a fire within her that continues to burn to this day. That’s another reason why the cover of this book is so meaningful and apt. As an intimate observer of my
mother’s life, I saw work become a true vocation for her, one that expanded both her professional and personal horizons. The ‘true believers’ of Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR) will appreciate the holistic application that its principles carry.

In my (somewhat biased) view, one of my mother’s great skills is the ability to translate theory into tangible action. The enormous potential of ALAR was clear to her by the late 1980s, yet at that time the work was conducted in isolated pockets throughout the world. Those were days before the internet, video-conferencing and other technologies that enable us to connect far and wide in seconds, so opportunities to collaborate and share this progressive thinking in a truly global sense were limited. Her vision to provide a structured forum to bring together disparate proponents of the new discipline became the first world congress held in Brisbane in 1990. The congress became a catalyst for establishing the Action Learning Action Research and Process Management Association in 1991. It also provided a foundation stone upon which future congresses and a wealth of future developments have been built.

At a professional level, one of the early outworkings of this expanded thinking lay in the practical application of ALAR principles to develop leadership development programs for private and public sector executives. Although relatively commonplace today, back in the 1980s there was a deep divide – and mutual distrust – between industry and academia. Together with a small number of like-minded individuals, such as Bob Dick, my mother recognised that an ALAR framework could provide a very effective and practical way to bridge this divide and for industry leaders to develop their own skill sets and qualifications and to then establish similar frameworks throughout their businesses (ripple effect), for the betterment of staff and businesses as a whole. The outcome here was building learning organisations!

This work has continued and evolved over the years and as ALAR has increasingly been accepted and adopted in first world countries, Mum has shifted her focus to applying these principles in underprivileged communities. The possibilities to make a quantum difference to improving life in these communities and to help to break the shackles of poverty by providing a framework to help individuals within these communities to recognise, harness and develop their own abilities appealed to my mother. She first became aware of these possibilities through the work of inspirational pioneers such as the late Orlando Fals Borda, whom she first met in 1992. For the past two decades her energy has been increasingly devoted in this direction, primarily in South Africa but also in other disadvantaged communities such as within the Samoan community on the outskirts of Brisbane not so far from where she lives. It is work of which I am very proud.

A great many colleagues and friends (so often intertwined) have made a real difference to her professional and personal life. These relationships have been nourishing and fulfilling for the highly social person who my mother is. I would like to pay particular tribute to Judith Kearney and Maureen Todhunter, who share her values and her passion for ALAR and who have played an enormous role, including in South Africa in the last decade in particular, and Judith also with the Samoan
FOREWORD

community. Through their shared journey both Judith and Maureen have become trusted friends and confidantes.

And finally to you, meine liebe Mum, I’d like to express how proud I am of the positive difference your work has made – and continues to make – in so many lives. I’m grateful for the example you have set for me through the values you have lived out – especially in tough times. I hope to pass these on to your grandson. But most of all I want you to know that I love you very much.

Carsten Zuber
Melbourne
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book comprises the efforts, creative minds and energies of numerous people in tribute to the work and life of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. As well as the contributing authors of chapters and short tributes are, in particular, Robyn White through her formatting flair and Jo Anne Pomfrett through proofreading. The production team at Sense Publishers has provided excellent technical and editorial support.
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Richard Bawden

Throughout his four decade long experience in leadership positions within academia, Richard Bawden has placed a great deal of emphasis on the management of processes as the basis for effective education, action research, community engagement and organisational development. Of particular importance in this context has been his concern for the impact of worldview beliefs, values and attitudes and for the challenges that these represent to truly transformative learning and the critically creative management of change. He remains deeply committed to the application of systems principles and practices as conceptual frameworks and pragmatic guides respectively for dealing with complex, often chaotic circumstances that systems-of-interest typically confront from the environments in which they are embedded.

Pip Bruce Ferguson

Pip Bruce Ferguson is an educational consultant and researcher. She has spent most of her professional life in New Zealand, including as Director at Pip Bruce Ferguson Consultancies, as Teaching Developer at University of Waikato, Research Manager at Te Wananga o Aotearoa, and Senior Lecturer at Auckland University of Technology. From 2014 she is Teaching and Learning Developer at Dublin City University. Pip has always been an advocate for equity and social justice.

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Mary Brydon-Miller, PhD directs the University of Cincinnati’s Action Research Center and is Professor of Educational and Community-based Action Research in the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services. She is a participatory action researcher who conducts work in both school and community settings. She recently completed work on the Sage Encyclopedia of Action Research with co-editor David Coghlan. Other publications focus on the development of new frameworks for understanding research ethics in community. She recently completed a Fulbright Research Fellowship at Keele University in the United Kingdom where her work focussed on developing new strategies to inform the ethical conduct of community-based research.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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David Coghlan is an action research scholar and an Adjunct Professor at the School of Business, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, and a Fellow Emeritus of the college. Recent co-authored books include *Collaborative Strategic Improvement through Network Action Learning* (2011), *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (4th ed. 2014). He is co-editor (with Mary Brydon-Miller) of *The Sage Encyclopedia of Action Research*. He is currently on the editorial boards of *Action Research*, *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, among others.

Bob Dick

In the past Bob Dick has been shop assistant, electrician, draftsperson, recruitment officer and psychologist. For the past 30 years he has been academic, publisher, consultant, facilitator, and of course person. His consultancy and facilitation primarily help people learn action research, qualitative evaluation, change management, and the communication and facilitation skills which are a foundation for these. In this work he uses highly participative methods to help others to improve their practice while also trying to improve his own. When he isn’t doing these things he thinks about them. He maintains one of the world’s premier action research websites at Southern Cross University. He lives in the leafy western suburbs of Brisbane, in sub-tropical Australia, with his partner of 30 years, Camilla. He may be contacted at bdick@scu.edu.au.

Chris Kapp

Chris Kapp is an Emeritus Professor in Higher Education at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. He was the first Director of the Academic Staff Development Unit at the university from 1984 to 1996. From 1997 to 2007 he was the first Director of the Centre for Higher and Adult Education at the University of Stellenbosch. In his career he successfully supervised 44 Masters and 33 PhD candidates and has been an examiner for more than 50 theses. He has published more than 20 articles and has facilitated more than 130 weeklong workshops on ‘Writing for Publication’ and more than 80 weeklong workshops on ‘The Science and Art of Postgraduate Supervision and Assessment.’

Judith Kearney

Judith Kearney PhD is Director of Community Partnerships in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University. In this role she works with academics, industry groups and community organisations to progress partnerships that promote engaged scholarship. Judith’s preferred methodology is Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR). She has used this methodology
in partnerships with refugee and migrant communities, especially Pacific Island migrant communities. Judith is a member of the Griffith Institute for Educational Research. Much of her research aims to develop capacity within communities to promote educational and employment opportunities across the lifespan. A range of publications has resulted from this work.

**Ron Passfield**

Ron Passfield is co-owner and Director of Merit Solutions Australia, established in 1996 to provide human resource consultancy services to all levels of the public sector in Australia. He is also an Adjunct Professor with the Australian Institute of Business (AIB), an accredited higher education provider offering action research and action learning-based degrees up to and including PhD. Ron’s involvement in action learning and action research began in 1976. He was a founding member of ALARPM and President from 2002 to 2007 and was co-founder and Editor of the *ALAR Journal*. He worked as a manager in the Australian Public Service for 15 years and lectured at Griffith University for 10 years in organisation change and development. He has been actively engaged as an action learning and action research consultant since 1999 when he left Griffith University to work from home as a freelance academic and organisation consultant.

**Eileen Piggot-Irvine**

Eileen Piggot-Irvine is a Professor of Leadership at Royal Roads University (Victoria, Canada) and an Adjunct Professor at both Griffith University (Brisbane) and Unitec (Auckland). She was formerly Director of the New Zealand Action Research and Review Centre (NZARRC), Director of the New Zealand Principal and Leadership Centre (NZPLC) and Senior Lecturer at Massey University, and Head of the Education Management Centre, at Unitec. She has published four books, multiple book chapters, approximately 50 journal articles and presented too many keynotes etc. to count. In the last six years she has directed 11 evaluation contracts (several at a national level) and recently won a national Canadian grant to lead a team of researchers investigating the impact of action research. She may be contacted at Eileen.piggotirvine@royalroads.ca.nz

**Shankar Sankaran**

Shankar Sankaran is the Professor of Organisational Project Management at the Faculty of Design Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and an Associate Editor of the *Sage International Encyclopaedia of Action Research* (2014). Shankar has been an advocate of Action Research (AR) since he completed his PhD in 1999 using this methodology. He is a distinguished fellow of the AR Centre, University of Cincinnati and Chair of the AR Special
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Integration Group at the International Society for the Systems Sciences (ISSS). He is a chief investigator in an Australian Research Council project that used AR as a meta-methodology. Shankar has supervised eight doctoral students using AR as their methodology. He has also been a special issue editor for *Action Research*.

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Doris Santos has an MA in Linguistics and an MPhil at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. She has a PhD from Charles Sturt University, Australia. She conducts participatory action research, critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis research projects on higher education issues. She is the leader of the inter-university research group Estudios del Discurso (Discourse Studies) and a member of the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN); the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis Network (PEP); Association of Latin American Discourse Studies (AED); and the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE).

**Richard Teare**

Richard Teare is President of the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) which he co-founded in 2007. In this capacity he has helped to create learning and development applications for many organisations and in different parts of the world. He is the co-author (with Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt) of *Lifelong Action Learning for Community Development* (Sense Publishers, 2013), the first in a series of books about GULL’s work with communities. Prior to his current role, he held professorships at four UK universities and he has been a journal editor for more than 25 years. His academic publications include 20 co-authored and edited books on aspects of service management and organisational learning. GULL’s mission is a source of self-help and encouragement to low income communities and for an overview of GULL’s work see: www.gullonline.org

**Maureen Todhunter**

Maureen Todhunter is an academic copy editor through Griffith University, Brisbane. She also facilitates workshops on academic writing and publishing in Australia and South Africa. She works in community radio, refugee community support and wildlife appreciation.

**Yoland Wadsworth**

Yoland Wadsworth has been a pioneer practitioner, facilitator and theorist in the development of transformative research and evaluation methodologies in Australia, including participatory, dialogic and ‘whole systems’ action research in health,
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

community and human services for over 38 years. She has authored Australia’s best-selling research methodology texts *Do It Yourself Social Research* and *Everyday Evaluation on the Run* and the final work in this methodology trilogy: *Building in Research and Evaluation: Human Inquiry for Living Systems* (all Left Coast Press, San Francisco, 2011). She is an Adjunct Professor, RMIT University; Hon. Principal Fellow, University of Melbourne; Fellow of the Australasian Evaluation Society and Distinguished Fellow of the Action Research Center, University of Cincinnati. She is a past president and life member of the Action Learning, Action Research Association.

**Lesley Wood**

Lesley Wood, DEd, MA, BA, BASS, PGCHE is a Research Professor, Faculty of Education Sciences, North-West University, South Africa. Previously a social worker, Lesley is committed to helping educational stakeholders address the social disadvantages they face within contexts of poverty and specifically with reference to HIV and AIDS. Lesley has more than 40 accredited publications and is rated by the National Research Foundation (NRF). She is an Editor of the journal, *Educational Research for Social Change* (www.ersc.nmmu.ac.za) and currently holds an NRF community engagement grant to conduct research on how tertiary researchers can better work with communities to generate knowledge that is mutually beneficial and will lead to contextualised and relevant social change. A past president of the Education Association of South Africa, she currently represents that body on the World Education Research Association Council.
TRIBUTES TO ORTRUN ZUBER-SKERRITT

On a cold, wet winter’s night in a Dandenong Mountains’ restaurant, Ortrun and I were discussing our action research on using video in higher education. We had just delivered a conference paper. Nowadays, everyone uses screen imagery in, or even as, the classroom (witness the explosion of MOOCs), and action research is practised worldwide. But back then, in 1988, colleagues simply ignored the educational possibilities of these new technologies and methodologies. Yet Ortrun is both visionary and problem-oriented. She never gives up. On that very night, Ortrun decided that action learning and action research (ALAR) must have its own platform and she conceptualised the first ALAR world symposium, held in 1988. She followed this with biennial world conferences. It is no wonder that she is now pre-eminent in the field, with numerous publications and an international network of peers and students. Congratulations on a stellar career, dear colleague, dear friend.

Mary Farquhar, Emeritus Professor, Sydney

A Google search for ‘Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt’ reveals a women of influence, intellect and integrity with extraordinary professional achievements. She has been awarded multiple titles in Australia and internationally – from Adjunct Professor at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia to Professor Extraordinaire, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa; four doctoral degrees – PhD in Literature (University of Queensland), PhD in Higher Education (Deakin University), DLitt in Management Education (International Management Centres Association), and Honorary Doctor of Professional Studies (GULL). She is a prodigious author of books, book chapters, journal articles, conference papers and videos across a range of topics that centre on her work in action research and action learning. But no Google search will reveal Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, the friend, colleague and mentor who I have come to know and love through the work we have done together over the past decade. Ortrun is generous and wise – and a force to be reckoned with when a deadline is due! We have laughed and learned with heart and mind, drawing on our action research principles to nurture our friendship and professional work when times were challenging. Her relentless enthusiasm and energy for work parallels her dedication and commitment to her friends and family. Ortrun remains a source of inspiration to many. I feel grateful and privileged to have in my life Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, a great teacher and true friend.

Margaret Fletcher, Brisbane

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt is a quintessential international scholar. I have been stimulated by her work for decades, interacting frequently through manuscript reviews and e-mail. I have read the bulk of her work to my benefit, but we have never met in
TRIBUTES TO ORTRUN ZUBER-SKERRITT

person. Judging from the reflections of others who know her personally, not having met her is my loss. But I am moved to reflect that the ability to be colleagues at a distance affirms the value of publications and the interactions they stimulate. There is, or can be, an international community of action researchers despite distances. This is about more than technology. Ortrun is a networker who encourages our communications by sharing work and maintaining contacts regularly. Consistent with her diverse body of work, she ranges across intellectual, regional, and practice traditions while linking the study of organisations, communities, and pedagogies to create fairer, healthier, and more sustainable organisations.

Davydd J. Greenwood, Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology, Cornell University, USA

ORTRUN IS PASSION …

Passion for her work: Whenever/wherever I have met Ortrun in Austria, Germany or Australia she is always on fire with enthusiasm: bubbling over with ideas for her next book, explaining the concept of her last workshop, planning a stream on action learning and action research at the next world congress … Not only is she infected with this special virus, but she ‘infects’ her environment as well – it’s nearly impossible not to be beguiled by her passion.

Passion for her mission: ‘Make the world a better place’ – maybe it is due to her family background and the values learned through her education, to her status as wise woman or, finally, to her role as grandmother. Ortrun worries about the big challenges for humankind – and still works extremely hard to make her contributions for a better world.

Passion for her students: Contrary to some other colleagues, Ortrun loves her students (and vice versa!). She encourages and promotes them with extraordinary commitment and ‘blistering patience’ (P. Neruda), one reason why the University of Innsbruck awarded her honorary citizenship.

Passion for people and networking: ‘Do you know my friend […] (Liesl, Ernstl, Nancy, Ingrid, Bob, Zbich, Judith, Maureen, Marilyn, Mary, Margaret, Richard, Ron, Chris, Ina etc.)? Whatever your plans might be, you must meet him/her. He/she is a fantastic colleague/person/friend. His/her work would be most valuable for you …!’ You can hardly escape – and typically she is right.

Passion for hospitality: Did you ever have the chance to experience and enjoy Ortrun’s hospitality? I did. And my whole family did. I remember wonderful spontaneous meals, enjoyable breakfasts full of laughter, one or another bottle of Chardonnay. I remember Bribie Island, Broadwater Road, Eight Mile Plains etc. And I/we remember a wonderful and most generous host …

Passion for Tyrol: In her twenties, Ortrun came to Innsbruck studying sport. It was the beginning of an everlasting love. Here, Ortrun learned that people go skiing
TRIBUTES TO ORTRUN ZUBER-SKERRITT

whatever the weather, whatever the risk of avalanches and whatever their physical shape – even with a damaged knee or two … And again she infected other people with this virus.

People merely exist through reason; they live through their passion. Take care of your passions, dear Ortrun.

*Stephan Laske, Professor Emeritus, Innsbruck, Austria*

Like honey pot to bees, Ortrun draws people to her. So with me, when participating in a leadership development program that Ortrun facilitated in Pretoria in 1999. Immediately I felt connection with her, particularly her work ethic. Ortrun so clearly wants – and tries hard – to improve and empower people around her. She motivated me to continue studying for my Masters and Doctoral degrees and still offers professional support by encouraging me to publish. I have learned so much through observation; Ortrun truly practises what she preaches in all of her life. Not surprisingly, then, that on safaris with Ortrun we’ve sat around the fire, glass in hand, reflecting on a program recently completed while coming to new understanding. As Ortrun observes, ‘we worked hard and we play hard’, with a few for the road. My road has been extended and enriched by the professional support and camaraderie of our generous colleague and friend, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. Qualitatively so! Deep thanks, Ortrun.

*Ina Louw, Education Consultant, University of Pretoria, South Africa (and Boen, her good-natured husband, driver, ranger and braai master)*

Ortrun is a role model, mentor and coach par excellence. She is an embodiment of what Action Research and Action Learning is. From the first day I attended a workshop she was facilitating, I did not want to miss an opportunity to draw out more and learn from her accumulated wealth of wisdom. I find Ortrun extremely resourceful and generous, happily connecting you to her personal networks for your own enrichment and growth. She openly shares her personal strategies that have led to her many accomplishments and makes the tasks ahead all sound so doable. Her persistent work supporting women in higher education is highly commendable, a special contribution to celebrate and cherish dearly. Ortrun is empathetic, deeply caring of the people with whom she interacts, and is such an inspiration. It is a great honour to learn from her and a pleasure to enjoy her friendship over the years.

*Matee Madiba, Director Student Affairs, University of Pretoria, South Africa*

Professor Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt is one of the best known educational experts in the areas of action learning and action research, and the scholarship of learning and teaching. She has published extensively in these areas, following her earlier scholarship on Australian playwrights, and has received a number of large grants. Professor Zuber-Skerritt continues to deliver keynote addresses both nationally
and internationally and is in great demand on the international lecture circuit. Her contribution to learning and teaching scholarship is outstanding, with at my last count 36 books, 45 book chapters, and over 160 research and professional papers and educational programs, and these numbers increase each year. She holds adjunct and honorary positions at a number of universities and continues to teach by invitation in Europe, Australia and South Africa. From a personal point of view, I have worked with Ortrun in a number of universities and have also participated in overseas research programs with her. She is a very caring, talented professional who very generously mentors the next generation of scholars and researchers – a true model as a friend and colleague.

Marilyn McMeniman, Professor Emeritus AM, Griffith University, Brisbane

Ortrun and I have been friends for over 40 years and colleagues for part of that time, albeit in different universities. Over these years Ortrun’s enthusiasm and passion for her research and projects has not waned. But of course she has matured in that in later years she has actively mentored less experienced researchers, sought active collaboration with a range of colleagues and nurtured those participating in her action learning/action research workshops in the community. She was entrepreneurial before universities encouraged this – in the German Department of the University of Queensland, in the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching at Griffith University, and in particular in organising the first World Congress on Action Learning and Action Research and finding sponsors, which was pretty much unheard of in those days. She has always been generous with her time, her ideas and her hospitality. Her humour is infectious. People want to be with her and work with her. Congratulations, dear Ortrun. We love and honour you.

Ingrid Moses, Emeritus Professor, Chancellor of University of Canberra

Ortrun has been a stalwart of the action research community in Australia for many years, and her contributions to our work have been extensive. From her publications to her organisational work, she is recognised for the energy and enthusiasm she injects into her work, and is often responsible for energising those around her. Her international work has been particularly effective, and her ability to marshal the ideas of colleagues and students exemplary. Many thanks, Ortrun, for your contribution to my own and to others’ work.

Ernie Stringer, Research Consultant, Fremantle, Australia

Professor Zuber-Skerritt, Ortrun, Otti ... I feel very fortunate to be your friend for quarter of a century. While not a former student or learned colleague, I’ve enjoyed so many hours of conversation and laughter with you on your beloved Bribie Island. With a glass of wine or two, we’ve also shared valuable learnings along the way. I’ve always admired your ability to meet and mix with a diverse range of people with the same respect you afford your peers, and your enthusiasm for what you learn.

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through your interactions. You are extremely generous with your time, resources and ideas. Your passion for action, embraced in Action Learning and Action Research, is infectious. No wonder you are loved and respected by family, colleagues and other friends near and far. Congratulations, Ortrun, on your professional and personal success. Thank you for the bounty of care and compassion, love and laughter, warmth and wisdom you give to us.

Dian Stroud, Brisbane

Ortrun has been a close friend and colleague of mine for many years. She has made an outstanding contribution to the field of action research and to education more generally. She is one of the best teachers I have ever learned from and she has been an extraordinary mentor to colleagues and students. She has contributed to education internationally, not only in Germany and Australia but also in South Africa. Her publication record is amazing and she continues to write and encourage others at full pace. Her personal qualities of loyalty, generosity, affection, sparkling good humour and resilience in the face of setbacks are admirable. We are fortunate to have her as a good friend and colleague.

Nancy Viviani AO, Emeritus Professor, Brisbane
1. FESTSCHRIFT FOR ORTRUN ZUBER-SKERRITT

INTRODUCTION

This book is a Festschrift for Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt. A ‘Festschrift’, borrowing from German, is a celebratory publication, literally a ‘feast-script’, to honour a respected person, especially an academic. Publication and celebration are particularly fitting here. Both are vitally important to Ortrun’s understanding and practice of scholarship, as an academic oriented to creating knowledge through solving real-life problems. Publication is a staple in Ortrun’s career, since central to her epistemology is the understanding that knowledge created through research should be made public for all to share. Celebration is also a staple, since Ortrun actively – joyfully – upholds the importance of publicly acknowledging, sharing the lessons and pleasures, and further encouraging the success of research and learning through efforts and achievements of collaborators, students, colleagues and others.

The chapters in this book shed light on Ortrun’s bounty of contributions to knowledge and learning, for and with individuals, organisations, and communities large and small, continuously in pursuit of a better world for all. In this way the book pays tribute to Ortrun’s life and endless work. I say ‘endless’ as Ortrun has never accepted that retirement might mean the end of work. As Ortrun herself explains, ‘For me, retirement means doing only what I enjoy most: teaching, coaching, giving seminars and workshops, or generally, helping other people in their learning’ (Zuber-Skerritt, 2009, p. 193). I am privileged to be one of the many whom Ortrun has helped in their learning and I am honoured to introduce this Festschrift for her.

ORTRUN ZUBER-SKERRITT: AN ACADEMIC LIFE OF ACTION

Ortrun’s undergraduate and early postgraduate studies were at the University of Kiel, Germany, where she gained a broad education including philosophy, languages, literature and culture with a major in human movement studies. When reflecting on her experiences in Germany as a young person, Ortrun has often described herself as ‘an action girl’ who loved her skiing, cycling, swimming and mountain climbing. A combination of action and learning through recreational pursuits and training and work as a physical education teacher defined who she was. After arriving in Australia in 1971, Ortrun worked briefly as a high school teacher before tutoring in the German Department at the University of Queensland. It was then that Ortrun completed a PhD from the University of Queensland researching Australian drama.
to which she had actively turned her passions. Ortrun further pursued her interest in this field through a collection of interviews with Australia’s leading playwrights of the time, which she had made into videos that are now a very valuable contribution to historical record. This was the first of four doctoral qualifications, with the other awards being a PhD in Higher Education from Deakin University, Australia; a Doctor of Letters (DLitt) in Management from the International Management Centre, in the United Kingdom; and an Honorary Doctorate from the Global University for Lifelong Learning.

In 1974, Ortrun was appointed as a lecturer in the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching at Griffith University in Brisbane. Across the four decades since this watershed move to Higher Education, Ortrun has built a career as a respected academic and contributed many exciting ideas and innovations to learning and scholarship for and through Higher Education. Her contributions are not just to learning and scholarship since Ortrun is a practical hands-on person of action and her research orientation is always to solving real problems in a sustainable way for others to benefit, as well as to the practical and conceptual lessons through that process. The chapters that follow illustrate how.

FESTSCHRIFT CONTRIBUTIONS

People from various strands in Ortrun’s life have contributed to this Festschrift. Carsten Zuber, Ortrun’s son, has provided the foreword and suggested the striking painting by Ortrun’s brother Wolfram for the book’s front cover. Brief tributes from some of Ortrun’s colleagues, friends and mentees follow Carsten’s piece. Collectively, these reflections capture Ortrun as a woman of intellect, integrity, vision and action, who is a loyal and generous friend as well as a dedicated academic.

The rest of the book comprises chapters written by some of Ortrun’s colleagues and friends from around the world. Each helps to illustrate Ortrun’s seminal role in the evolving paradigm of Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR). ALAR, more recently explicitly identifying its participatory nature as PALAR, is the methodology, approach and worldview by which Ortrun not only researches but lives her life to the fullest, while co-creating knowledge and helping to develop the ability to create knowledge through problem solving among people across the world. In each chapter, authors trace the development of aspects of ALAR relating to their own work, and discuss linkages with Ortrun’s work. These linkages interweave with the book’s unifying theme of ‘change for a better world’, consistent with Ortrun’s use of this theme in recent publications (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015). The Festschrift concludes with reflections from Maureen Todhunter, co-editor of this book.

The following 12 chapters are sequenced in four parts that relate to areas of focus for Ortrun’s work and interests over the last 30 years. Part I is Higher Education, the site for most of Ortrun’s work experience since 1974 when she joined Griffith University. Part II, Organisations, is a context in which Ortrun has actively explored processes of learning, leadership and development in management education. Part III
Communities of Practice, which have characterised Ortrun’s work throughout her career as evidenced particularly in her work involving PALAR in higher education and communities. Part IV is Futures, an interest that focusses much of Ortrun’s recent writing where she advocates for ALAR/PALAR as a flexible and effective methodology for responding to or even pre-empting challenges associated with rapid change.

Higher Education

Ortrun worked for 23 years in the higher education sector, in full-time positions at Griffith University, University of Queensland and Southern Cross University. Since 1997 she has been an Adjunct Professor at Griffith University and, more recently, a Professor Extraordinaire at Tshwane University of Technology (Pretoria) and at North-West University (Potchefstroom) in South Africa. Universities worldwide have sought Ortrun’s expertise. As an example, Ortrun was a regular Visiting Professor for 15 years at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, teaching and coaching groups of doctoral students in the social sciences. In recognition for Ortrun’s achievements in research and postgraduate teaching, she was awarded an ‘Honorary Citizen of the University of Innsbruck’ in 2003.

Ortrun’s international reputation in the fields of higher education and action research was recognised when her second doctoral thesis, a PhD in Higher Education from Deakin University in 1987, was published in two companion books: Professional Development in Higher Education: A Theoretical Framework for Action Research and Action Research in Higher Education: Examples and Reflections (both by Kogan Page, London, 1992). Since then Ortrun has published regularly on issues affecting higher education with a very strong focus on postgraduate education. Ortrun’s CV reveals she has published what I estimate to be 38 books and almost 100 book chapters or refereed journal articles. Several colleagues have acted as critical friends for her writing. They include Mary Brydon-Miller of the United States and David Coghlan of the United Kingdom, who have co-authored Chapter 2 in this volume, ‘Mirror, mirror: Action research takes a hard look at higher education’.

Mary and David acknowledge Ortrun’s contribution in promoting Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR) to improve teaching and learning practice through professional development. They share with Ortrun a concern that higher education institutions now and in the future must critically consider how the instrumental rationality paradigm that dominates higher education is neither ethically sound nor effective for embracing local and global challenges in positive ways. The authors propose that action research and lifelong action learning strategies, as discussed in Ortrun’s 2013 publication with Richard Teare, provide a way forward in reconsidering learning environments within universities, community engagement practices and research agendas and protocols. As Mary and David conclude, this shift in thinking and action ‘offers a more positive and generative image of higher education’ in line with Ortrun’s quest for a better world.
Chapter 3, ‘An action learning approach to writing scholarly journal articles’, is written by Chris Kapp. Chris first read Ortrun’s work in the late 1980s, but did not meet her until 1996. This meeting began Ortrun’s long association with South Africa. Since 1997, higher education institutions in Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Potchefstroom have invited Ortrun to facilitate workshops and present leadership programs. Many of these invitations involved presentations with Chris, and as a result of these visits, Ortrun developed a deep love for South Africa, its landscapes and its animals. Indeed, Ortrun has often followed an intensive week of university work with a safari, a tradition underpinned by her belief in the importance of both ‘work and play’ and their mutual benefits.

Ortrun clearly has a special place in her heart for the people of South Africa, and has been a treasured mentor for several female academics from South African universities. Between 2000 and 2002, she secured a national competitive grant from AusAID for an international development program on ‘Leadership Development for Women Academics in South Africa’. In 2007, she obtained another AusAID grant that funded a leadership development program through action learning and action research for teams from six African countries.

This project involved a partnership between Griffith University and the University of Stellenbosch. It gave me the opportunity to work with Ortrun for the first time and to witness the rich professional relationship she shared with Chris Kapp in action.

Chris’s chapter explains how action learning principles and processes are embedded in his approach to promoting scholarly writing. Chris and his team have used this approach with South African academics for ten years with 150 workshops and 3,000 participants. Chris begins the chapter with an explanations of the South African academic context. He explains the philosophical underpinnings of his action learning approach to the writing of journal articles, describes the design of the workshop elements, and provides an analysis of participant feedback. The chapter concludes with a reflection on future strategies to sustain the approach. Chris acknowledges the inspiration, enthusiasm and collegiality of Ortrun in conceptualising his action learning approach to scholarly writing.

Doris Santos from Colombia has authored Chapter 4, the final chapter in Part I. She is one of the many female academics who has benefitted from Ortrun’s mentorship and boundless kindness. Their meeting was inevitable as both women shared an interest in action research as a process to enhance learning in a higher education context. Doris’s chapter, ‘Weaving together: Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt’s legacy to PAR from a Colombian female academic’s perspective’, shares three stories. Collectively, the stories demonstrate Ortruns’ inspirational contribution to PAR communities through publishing collaborations and networking activities. Each of the stories emphasises Ortrun’s ‘generosity, joy, hard work and solidarity’ as the threads she uses to weave a web of relationships to move us towards a better world.
Organisations

Part II on Organisations comprises Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Shankar Sankaran, who has lived in a number of countries, has written the first of these, ‘Achieving synergy through combining action learning and action research’. He discusses the differences and similarities between action learning and action research as processes, and explains their synergy and practicality when combined, using the example of a model proposed by Ortrun and her colleague, Chad Perry. Shankar applied this model in his doctoral studies and has since used it with postgraduate students to generate research outcomes in the context of organisations. He argues that ALAR is a pragmatic approach for doctoral students seeking both organisational change and rigorous research. Shankar concludes by acknowledging Ortrun’s enthusiasm and valuable contribution to his own scholarly journey and to ALAR communities worldwide.

In Chapter 6, Ron Passfield from Australia explains Ortrun as ‘The “practical visionary”’, who not only describes a vision for a better world but works actively to make it happen while inspiring others to contribute. Ron met Ortrun in 1989 when she was organising the International Symposium on Action Research in Industry, Government and Education in Brisbane. The following year, Ortrun convened the First World Congress on Action Learning and Action Research. Ron supported Ortrun in this endeavour and went on to work with her to create the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) Association, an initiative that realised Ortrun’s vision to bring together practitioners from a variety of practice contexts where they used three different processes – action learning, action research and process management. In the course of these collaborations, Ron noted particular attributes that set Ortrun apart from others. These include the strength of her belief in others and in herself, her drive to contribute to a better world and support others to do this, her ability to establish a network of critical friends, and her openness to their critique as a means of enhancing her own learning and self-improvement and to some extent their own as well.

In Chapter 7, Eileen Piggot-Irvine from New Zealand and now in Canada emphasises Ortrun’s transformative influence on her professional and personal life. In ‘Collaboration, innovation and evaluation in action research: Life with Ortrun for a better world’, Eileen describes Ortrun as ‘the key outstanding mentor in my life’s work’ and a ‘deeply caring, loving friend of myself and family’. Eileen illustrates these claims through three areas of interest as an action researcher:

1. the creation of authentic collaboration as the most important underpinning of action research;
2. the introduction of Repertory Grid Technique as an innovative tool for action research; and
3. the evaluation of process and impact of action research via a global ‘Evaluative Study of Action Research’ (ESAR).
She concludes that what Ortrun espouses – authentic collaboration, openness and transparency – is what Ortrun truly practises. Indeed, Ortrun herself continues to remind us that as action researchers we must practise what we preach.

Communities of Practice

Part III, on the various communities where Ortrun has worked, comprises Chapters 8, 9 and 10. Lesley Wood from South Africa provides Chapter 8, ‘PALAR for community engagement: the postgraduate voice’. While Ortrun and Lesley have worked collaboratively for fewer than five years, they have developed a strong partnership in that time using Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR), an approach to engage meaningfully with communities for mutual learning and development. Lesley reflects on a PALAR project involving higher degree research students and their supervisors. She outlines the guiding principles of the PALAR process, explains PALAR’s appeal and benefits, identifies its challenges, and offers a response to these challenges. Lesley argues that we need to reconsider traditional approaches to educational research and adopt a participatory and engaged approach if we are to prepare people for life in the twenty-first century. She acknowledges Ortrun’s ongoing support to realise this goal in a South African context.

Chapter 9, ‘Building national and international action research communities of practice’, is by Pip Bruce Ferguson from New Zealand and now in Dublin. Pip traces the development of action research communities of practice in New Zealand and reflects on that experience as an involved member of the New Zealand Action Research Network (NZARN). She notes the support and influence of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) network then active in Australia and shares reflections on that journey by several ALARPM members, including Ortrun. Pip emphasises the importance of relationships in building communities and the significance of networking. She notes Ortrun’s capacity to develop positive relationships and to network locally and internationally. Pip also considers how communities of practice develop in international contexts, acknowledging the role of events such as the World Congress to connect participants with each other, and the potential of digitally mediated platforms to sustain and further develop these connections.

Chapter 10, ‘Creating world congresses of action learning and action research to network an international community’, is by Yoland Wadsworth from Australia. Yoland pays tribute to Ortrun’s contribution to the series of world congresses that have brought together the global community of action researchers and action learners to network and share collaboratively. She provides an historical overview of these congresses, acknowledging Ortrun’s initiation and convening of the First World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management (ALARPM) in Brisbane in 1990. At the Second World Congress in 1992, Ortrun launched the international ALARPM Association, now called ALARA (http://www.alarassociation.org), a worldwide network of innovative consultants
and educators in industry, government, education and the community, using action learning processes. We learn that Ortrun was on the Executive Committee for the first seven world congresses, has contributed at all congresses, and has captured the reflections of congress participants in her publications. Yoland identifies the unique characteristics of world congresses, emphasising features such as networking, creative modes of presentation, and participants’ diverse contexts and interests.

Futures

The final part of this Festschrift perhaps inevitably turns to the future. In Chapter 11, ‘Action learning and action research for a turbulent future’, Bob Dick from Australia emphasises the need for responsive and flexible processes to address rapid change in future times. Ortrun’s writings frequently identify this need and similarly urge action for sustainable outcomes. Bob claims that both the AL and AR in ALAR – an integration championed by Ortrun some 25 years ago – are ideal processes in managing an uncertain future. Bob points out two features of ALAR that make it a useful approach when responding flexibly to rapid change: the cyclic process that characterises this approach and the nesting of cycles with different time scales and scopes. The future Bob envisages is turbulent, with possible threats to global wellbeing driven by increasing globalisation and the increasing power of technology. Bob reminds us of how these two trends have transformed means of communication and access to information in current times. He calls on us to consider a response where we intervene locally in communities and organisations using ALAR strategies to create a resilient social ecology where individuals collaborate for collective benefit – and thus for a better world.

In Chapter 12, ‘Researching plausible futures: managing the process’, Richard Bawden of Australia shares Bob Dick’s views when contemplating the future. Like Bob, Richard describes the future as ‘unpredictable’ and ‘uncertain’ and emphasises the need for capabilities to deal with it. Richard argues for the development of processes that assist us in ‘learning how to learn from the future, for the future’. He introduces readers to QUEST™ as a process management approach to scenario learning, and distinguishes it from other approaches to scenario planning by its experiential nature, systemic approach, and emphasis on critical self-reflexivity. Richard acknowledges Ortrun’s contribution to his current thinking by reference to a writing collaboration in 1990 where she encouraged him to develop a more critical appreciation of process management.

Richard Teare, of the UK, presents the final contribution to this Festschrift in Chapter 13, ‘Applying the concept of lifelong action learning: learning and development for a better world.’ Since 2008 Ortrun has championed Richard’s work through the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL), a not-for-profit foundation that promotes holistic lifelong learning using an action learning approach. In this chapter, Richard explains Ortrun’s contribution to the concept of Lifelong Action Learning (LAL), and the conceptual framework that
underpins the work of GULL. Richard traces Ortrun’s practical and theoretical contributions to the GULL network since its inception in 2007, drawing from five of Ortrun’s recent publications. His analysis provides a very clear picture of how Ortrun’s contributions have helped shape an inclusive approach to learning and community development. Richard acknowledges Ortrun’s pre-eminence as a visionary scholar and generous friend.

Following the four parts, the Festschrift concludes with Part V, Concluding Reflection. In Chapter 14, ‘A fitting celebration’, my co-editor Maureen Todhunter reflects critically on this Festschrift, its contributions to knowledge of Ortrun as an ALAR ‘mover and shaker’, and so to historical knowledge of the ALAR paradigm.

TO CONCLUDE

I have known Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt as colleague since 2007. This is a much shorter period than the long friendships and professional relationships that most contributors to this Festschrift have shared with Ortrun. However, during the last eight years I have come to know Ortrun also as a valued mentor and caring friend. Ortrun has inspired me – and all who have contributed to this Festschrift – to be better able to reach out to others through reflective, inclusive action. As the narratives in this book convey, her behaviour has modelled for us how to do this. From Ortrun we have learned further how to take informed, democratic action through ALAR/PALAR as we work collectively to build a better world. We and many others have much to be grateful for from Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt.

REFERENCES


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PART I

HIGHER EDUCATION
2. MIRROR, MIRROR

Action Research Takes a Hard Look at Higher Education

*Queen*: Slave in the magic mirror, come from the farthest space, through wind and darkness I summon thee. Speak! Let me see thy face.

*Magic Mirror*: What wouldst thou know, my Queen?

*Queen*: Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?

(From Disney’s 1937 film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*)

When the Wicked Queen in the story Snow White asks the magic mirror this question, she expects to get the same answer she always does. ‘You, your majesty, are fairest of them all’. But the mirror tells her the truth…

We’re used to deceiving ourselves about the impact of university education and research. But if those of us in higher education had a magic mirror and were forced to face the painful truth about our institutions – Do we provide the highest quality education to our students? Do we make the resources of our universities available to our communities? Does our research contribute to positive social change? – the answers we get might be just as difficult to bear as the mirror’s observation that Snow White was the more beautiful. It’s important that we take a hard look at the current state of higher education, though, if we are to develop new strategies to improve educational opportunities for our students and ensure that the research carried out under the auspices of our institutions makes a positive contribution to society. Action research can serve as this mirror, and at the same time can act as a window onto potential futures, providing us with a view of the kinds of knowledge we will need to address these concerns.

One of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt’s many contributions has been to explore Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR) in higher education (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). A particular emphasis has been to explore ALAR’s role in improving teaching and learning practice through professional development. Our chapter explores how action learning and action research can be used to challenge the basic structures of the contemporary university, through not only its teaching and research but also its very identity. Recent trends toward an increased emphasis on rankings of students, faculty, and institutions and on the commercialisation of knowledge suggest a system that has lost track of its responsibility to contribute to positive change. In this
chapter we seek to build on Zuber-Skerritt’s work to recapture that focus on social responsibility and to suggest ways in which we might draw upon action research strategies to promote institutional change.

In their book, *Lifelong Action Learning for Community Development*, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and her colleague Richard Teare (2013, p. 7) describe a process of learning that is ‘about encouraging and helping to enable all people, especially in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities in our world, to develop their learning potential by discovering their special gifts, cascading their learning, and developing these gifts together with other like-minded people’. While Zuber-Skerritt and Teare make clear that this process is not to be confined to formal educational systems, our contention would be that institutions of higher education must embrace Lifelong Action Learning (LAL), for both ethical and practical reasons. Higher education finds itself at a critical crossroads. As described in the recent report, *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead* (Barber, Donnelly & Rizvi, 2013), current global economic, environmental, and political issues require citizens who are prepared to respond in innovative, collaborative, and ethical ways if we are to address these challenges successfully. In order to do this, ‘deep, radical and urgent transformation is required in higher education’ (p. 5).

This same theme is reflected in Ronald Barnett’s recent book, *Imagining the University*, which raises the question, ‘Is it not part of the task of the university to try to do its best to usher in a different and even a better world?’ (2013, p. 10). We would argue that this is not simply a part of the task of the university, but the ethical imperative of the university. And one which seems to have been left by the wayside in the current move to turn students into customers, faculty into underpaid part-time labourers, and the university itself into a commercial enterprise. Barnett invites readers to imagine the university anew – to create as many ‘feasible utopias’ as possible with a view toward expanding our vision of the potential of higher education. Action research provides the tools for this process of recreating the university, and we feel a deep responsibility to bring our own experience and expertise to this process.

Action research offers concrete strategies not only for engaging in research to address these issues outside the university setting, but for leading a critical reflection within the academy itself designed to fundamentally change the very nature of higher education. It is only by embracing this opportunity for reinvention that the promise of higher education as a catalyst for positive change can be realised (Brydon-Miller, 2015, in press).

Highlighting the contrast between traditional educational systems and their own proposed approach, Zuber-Skerritt and Teare (2013, p. 17) identify the following elements of lifelong action learning:

- Learner centered;
- Process and project based;
- Interdisciplinary, problem oriented;
• Located in real-life work;
• Inclusive, accessible to all, aimed at social justice;
• Informal, self-directed learning;
• Based on contemporary cultural context;
• Communities of learning, action learning sets;
• Collaboration, cooperation.

Their description echoes the elements that Levin and Greenwood (2008) outline for the university of the future. ‘We believe that universities should be reorganised to meet the challenges of redeveloping public support by structuring teaching and research through action research strategies. This means problem selection, analysis, action design, implementation, and evaluation by collaborative multi-disciplinary teams of academics and non-university stakeholders’ (p. 211). Moving to such an idea of a university of the future involves challenging the current model of professional education that dominates higher education.

CHALLENGING THE DOMINANT PARADIGM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Technical or instrumental rationality is a term that describes the dominant paradigm of professional knowledge (Schön, 1983). It is characterised by underlying disciplines of basic science upon which professional practice is built and instrumental problem-solving is conducted rigorously by the application of scientific theory and methods. Schein (1972) describes its components.

• An underlying discipline or basic science upon which practice is developed;
• An applied science from which day-to-day diagnostic procedures and problem solutions are derived;
• A skills and attitudinal component that concerns actual performance of services to clients using the underlying basic and applied science.

This paradigm is embedded in the institutional structures and philosophy of the education of professionals. Professional curriculum begins with science and is followed by an applied component. Students learn the science first. Otherwise they have nothing to apply. Skills are a secondary knowledge.

The outcome of this paradigm is a hierarchy of knowledge. Science is on top and technical skills of day-to-day practice are on the bottom. The nearer one is to basic science, the higher is one’s academic status. Academics are superior to practitioners. The corollary is that there is a split between theory and practice, a split that is grounded in positivist philosophy of science.

Schön (1987) presents the counter-position and argues the case for a different focus for professional education.

• Inherent in the practice of professionals is a competence that we can recognise as artistry.
• Artistry is a kind of knowing that is different from the technical rational model.
Artistry forms a boundary around the practice of applied science and techniques as there is an art to problem framing, an art of implementation, and an art of improvisation that are necessary in the practice of applied science and technique.

Schön’s (1992) conclusion is to call for a new epistemology – one that can work with the tacit epistemology of the skilled professional. This tacit epistemology is the professional’s knowing-in-action – the spontaneous behaviour of the skilful practitioner that is based on a knowing of more than can be articulated. Uncovering such knowing is attempted through reflection-in-action and reflection-in-practice. With Argyris he framed the notion of action science, which seeks to create a science of action by systematically analysing and documenting patterns of behaviours and the reasoning behind them in order to identify causal links so as to produce actionable knowledge, that is, theories for producing desired outcomes (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Kinsella (2012) argues that Schön’s call for a new epistemology has much in common with Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis* because it involves reflection and certain types of judgement. Aristotle describes *phronesis* in terms of the good person whose life is oriented towards value, and not merely satisfaction, and whose courses of action are genuinely good because they are oriented towards values and because they recognise what is required to implement these values in the concrete situation (Eikeland, 2008). What is required, then, is to recreate the academy around this new epistemological and ethical stance.

With this view of a university grounded in reflective practice and action for positive change, we examine three components of the modern university as they currently exist and as they might be reimagined through an action research and lifelong action learning lens: the learning environment within the university, community engagement beyond the university, and research practice that engages broader issues of social change.

The Learning Environment

Visit almost any modern university classroom and you find yourself in a setting that hasn’t changed in centuries. Large lecture halls with tiers of seats all focussed on the podium from which a professor delivers lectures to a largely inert audience. Of course, in today’s classroom the room will be lit by the tiny oblong lights of cell phone screens held discretely in the laps of distracted students, but otherwise the scene is not much changed from the nineteenth century. Smaller classes still meet in rooms set up in rows of desks all pointing to the front of the room – the technology has changed, but the assumptions regarding who holds knowledge and who wields power in that setting have not. Try to move the furniture to accommodate any other style of learning and you’ll be chastised for creating a nuisance for your colleagues. Even in online learning environments the structure and content of learning remain under the control of the professor with their prepared learning modules and
sophisticated systems for tracking student participation. Freire’s notion of banking education still dominates classrooms, starting with the architecture (both physical and virtual) itself. And these classrooms sit in buildings that sit on campuses largely isolated from the communities around them. Campus security patrols the perimeter and buildings are locked to outsiders, sometimes physically and sometimes virtually through the use of technology that makes information available only to those with the correct password.

Revisiting Zuber-Skerritt and Teare’s criteria, we see how antithetical the modern university campus is to the practice of lifelong action learning. Rather than being learner-centred, classrooms and campuses focus attention on the instructor, reinforcing traditional power relationships at all levels. In place of individualised problem-oriented learning, admissions committees and other governing bodies increasingly rely upon the results of standardised tests to determine who gains access to educational opportunities and as a result curricula, from elementary education through graduate training, focus on the acquisition of a prescribed body of knowledge. Cooperation and collaboration, vital components of lifelong action learning, are discouraged in a system designed to encourage competition and a winner-take-all mentality.

If we are to accept Barnett’s challenge to imagine the university anew, how might we re-envision what classrooms and campuses look like? In our own experience there are existing models of learning environments that do reflect these values of cooperation, collaboration, accessibility and active student engagement. Interestingly, however, the models that come immediately to mind are not located on university campuses. The current location of the Highlander Research and Education Centre, founded in 1932 by Myles Horton, Don West and Jim Dombrowski, is on the side of a mountain in rural Tennessee (Hale, 2007; Schneider, 2014; Williams, 2014). The main meeting room is surrounded by windows looking out over the landscape and is furnished with a large circle of comfortable wooden rocking chairs, now the symbol of the organisation. It’s no wonder, then, that Highlander was founded after Horton visited the Danish folkhighschools in the early 1930s (the original name of the organisation was the Highlander Folk School), because the folkhighschools we’ve visited in Denmark and Sweden continue to provide learning environments that emphasise collaboration, problem-focused learning, and a connection to the local community. For example, on a recent visit we found the Ädelfors Folkhighschool in southern Sweden (http://www.adelfors.nu/information/english.aspx) showcasing the work of local artists, and the use of natural materials throughout the buildings with comfortable spaces for meeting, reading and sharing meals was all a conscious part of the learning environment.

Beyond the physical setting, there are also models of teaching and learning processes that engage the values articulated by Zuber-Skerritt and Teare. Van Lier (2006) in his introduction to Beckett and Miller’s volume Project-based Second and Foreign Language Education cites John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget,
and L. S. Vygotsky as important contributors to the development of project-based learning, one of the principles noted in Zuber-Skerritt and Teare’s list. Project-based learning ‘has the potential to embody the kind of politically engaged, transformative approach to education envisioned by Freire and other critical educators’ (Brydon-Miller, 2006, p. 42). At the same time, however, unless projects also reflect the principles of being learner-centred, inclusive, accessible to all, and aimed at social justice, this approach ‘runs the very real risk of instead becoming simply another formula for reinforcing existing systems of oppression’ (Brydon-Miller, 2006, p. 42). This leads to our second arena for reframing higher education – community engagement.

Community Engagement

Increasingly colleges and universities are using a rhetoric of community engagement and service learning to attempt to make education seem more relevant and meaningful to students. But too often the opportunities provided through such programs are short-term feel-good bungee jumps into communities, which as often as not reinforce negative attitudes toward the recipients of these efforts rather than encouraging more sustained and critical engagement with issues of poverty and marginalisation. Locating these learning opportunities in the context of community-based research efforts can provide for the kind of interdisciplinary, problem-oriented learning situated in contemporary cultural contexts and aimed at social justice that Zuber-Skerritt and Teare describe. But this kind of community-based research ‘requires that instructors venture outside the comfort zone of more conventional teaching, where they have the luxury of assuming a great deal of control over what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed’ (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker & Donohue, 2003, p. 155).

Here again, action research provides a variety of strategies and exemplars of community-based research that exhibit ‘a respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action’ (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 15). These core values of action research suggest an approach to community engagement that unsettles the common model of service learning by bringing students, faculty and community partners together as co-creators of knowledge and co-generators of social action. This new model of community-engaged learning faces many challenges within the traditional academic setting, which breaks education into discrete 16-week-long units with students’ attention and time divided among multiple academic subjects. The immersive co-op model of learning, in which students work full-time for an extended period within an organisation or business, provides a better model for community-engaged learning. Here the members of the community organisation, neighbourhood association, school, or other setting serve not as passive recipients of services designed and
delivered by outsiders, but rather as the experts whose experience and knowledge work with the support of university faculty to provide a curriculum grounded in the real-life work and contemporary cultural contexts described by Zuber-Skerritt and Teare as critical components of lifelong action learning. At the same time it creates the framework for research practices that are designed to grapple with the complexity of real-life problems and constantly changing social, economic, political and cultural landscapes. But this style of community engagement requires a research practice more closely aligned with the kind of reflection-in-practice outlined by Argyris and Schön.

Research Practice

Within the paradigm of technical rationality outlined above, research is firmly grounded in the domain of the disciplinary scientists who advise policymakers and funders what needs to be researched and how. Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994) describe this approach as Mode 1 research. This is research that arises from the academic agenda, and that agenda usually takes place within a singular discipline and is accountable to that discipline. The data are context-free and validated by logic, measurement and consistency of prediction and control. The role of the researcher is that of an observer, and the researcher’s relationship to the setting is detached and neutral. In many respects, Mode 1 captures the normal meaning of the term science, by which is meant that the aim of the research is to produce universal knowledge and to build and test theory within a disciplinary field. The type of knowledge acquired is universal covering law.

In contrast to Mode 1, Mode 2 research has the following characteristics. It is produced in the context of a particular application and so is relevant and useful to practitioners. It is characterised by trans-disciplinarity, in that it integrates different skills, multi- or interdisciplinary, depending on the application. It is characterised by heterogeneity and organisational diversity, in that multidisciplinary teams may be temporary and that members come and go as the situation unfolds and as different skills are required at different stages of the project. It is characterised by social accountability and reflexivity where there is accountability to outcomes and to the participants. This involves reflexivity and a sensitivity to the process of the research itself and to, for example, the dynamics of trans-disciplinarity. Finally, it is characterised by a diverse range of quality controls, in that unlike Mode 1 where the question of knowledge production is judged from the stance of the discipline, Mode 2 draws on a broader range of interests such as its application, and from the perspective of different stakeholders. As Levin and Greenwood (2008) point out, while Gibbons and his colleagues appear to be unaware of the generations of action research work, their notion of Mode 2 has generated rich discussion central to the debates about the future of higher education. It is our view that the constructs of
and subsequent discussions about Mode 2 contribute to our reflection on research practice and support our challenge to the instrumental rationality paradigm.

Action research changes what we take as knowledge. Its aim is to generate practical knowing (Coghlan, 2011), to change practices and social structures that maintain injustice, and unsatisfying forms of existence. It is about creating forms of inquiry that people can use in the conduct of their lives. Underpinning action research is the core value that people are not mere data points but are agents of experiencing, understanding, judging, valuing, deciding and acting. Action research adopts the position that research is with people, rather than for or about or on them, and that it is those directly affected by the practical issue who decide what research might be done, how, to what ends, and with what outcomes in mind. Accordingly, communities and organisational members act as co-researchers in the design, implementation and evaluation of the research that seeks to both improve the situation and to cogenerate actionable knowledge, that is, knowledge that is useful for practitioners and robust for scholars. It focuses attention on the research process itself alongside the concern for practical outcomes (Brydon-Miller & Coghlan, 2014). This approach also reflects the elements of lifelong-action research described by Zuber-Skerritt and Teare. Developing research practices that address worthwhile purposes, draw on many ways of knowing, generate knowledge in practice through participation and democracy, and follow an emergent developmental form, is a radical alternative to the Mode 1 paradigm in which higher education is currently locked (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we acknowledge Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt’s contribution of ALAR to improving teaching and learning in higher education practices. We have sought to build on it to open further exploration of how the foundations and philosophical underpinnings of higher education need to be challenged. At the heart of our exploration is a challenge to the instrumental rationality paradigm that dominates higher education and that finds expression in Mode 1 research. As an alternative we build on Schön’s notion of the artistry of the professional where practice is afforded value and that researchers and academics are trained in ALAR and create the learning environment of Lifelong Action Learning (LAL) proposed by Zuber-Skerritt and Teare. Their research is deeply embedded in community engagement and, in the form of action research and Mode 2 research, transforms research practices to address worthwhile purposes through participation and democracy so as to generate knowledge in practice. This shift in the way we understand the fundamental nature of research practice then informs changes in the nature of community engagement and a reconceptualisation of the learning environment itself, offering a more positive and generative image of higher education if only we dare to look in the mirror.
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