

## Developing a sense of appreciation for inquiry

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To cite this article: David Higgins (2017): Developing a sense of appreciation for inquiry, Action Learning: Research and Practice, DOI: [10.1080/14767333.2017.1358319](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2017.1358319)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2017.1358319>



Published online: 11 Aug 2017.



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## Developing a sense of appreciation for inquiry

It is with great pleasure I can write this editorial. You will be pleased to know I am not on a train, plane or boat this time. I am writing this from my home town of Westport, Co Mayo, sitting in one of my favourite spots watching the sun slowly set against a near perfect landscape. Looking out onto this scene I find myself recalling the long summer days which I spent in this area swimming and playing, watching the same things I am watching now almost 25 years on. This place for me is timeless the area has not changed, the rocks, the sea wall, even the playing pitch are all still here, untouched by time, but as I look upon this scene I find myself looking at it in a different light; I am part of this landscape but equally its influence on me has changed over the years. I guess we could use the term 'I have grown up' and with this maturity my ideas, assumptions and perspectives have and will change, but this idea of 'maturity' can be a very ambiguous term, it is part of life, but this has much greater implications than we realise. Paying attention to our experiences as a means of learning is important. The quality of our conversations becomes so important in terms of how our dialogue enables our ability to interpret and enquire in thoughtful and meaningful ways. The ability to ask the questions becomes critical.

In recent years, the field of action learning has witnessed a significant increase in scholarly activity. The management learning/education field has encompassed a wide spectrum of disciplines and methodological approaches, however, despite the developing richness of the field, it still suffers from a fear of methodological diversity (Higgins and Refai 2017). Getting close to the research subject, understanding context, engaging with the subject in a manner that illustrates critical insight demands very different skills and knowledge, as well as different philosophical perspectives. How we learn, develop and appreciate action is expressed through our language; learning can be viewed as a reflexive process involving how we become aware of the emergent nature of the dialogue we use to make sense of our experiences (Fletcher and Watson 2007). Doing and sharing research/experience with others creates both opportunity and space for dialogue (Hosking 2008, 2010), greater attention needs to be directed to the process of research as a learning in action. From such a perspective, 'I' does not exist without 'you' (Shotter 2010), as the collective 'we' are always in relation to others whether they are present or not. The focus is not on what that social reality is, but how people share meaning between themselves, with the aim of becoming more thoughtful, careful and reflexive about how we do so (Shotter 2008, 2010).

Research into and through action learning is a craft and our knowledge of methods and paradigmatic debate alone is not enough for engaging in this form of practitioner research. The fundamental question of what it means to be a practitioner, what they/we do and how they/we engage in action is becoming more obscured and fragmented. This is not to say that the knowledge we have gained about how we inquire into our learning through action is redundant, rather what is being suggested is that we use this knowledge as an opportunity to seek meaningful ways of exploring human practice. We need to be critical of the strengths and weaknesses of the current theories we have formulated. This involves taking time to understand and appreciate what we know, (Bourdieu 1990; Gherardi 2008; Korsgaard and Anderson 2011; Schatzki 2006; Watson 2000; Watson and Watson 2012). To practice is not simply a thing

which we look upon but rather a social enactment, a living experience, shaped and mediated by context, a means of becoming, co-constructed, as a practical measure of 'how it is and what we do' (Anderson, Dodd, and Jack 2012; Jack et al. 2010).

In this issue of the journal we are introduced to several interesting papers. The first paper by Pedler explores linkages between innovation and action learning, surfacing questions in regards to why is innovation so elusive and how can action learning and critical action learning enhance how we create. The second paper by S. Smith, addresses the role of action learning and leadership in the context of social enterprises by adopting a value creation framework to measure the value created using action learning as a learning intervention. In the third paper by Sell, we are confronted with the complexity of the world, and challenged to let go of control and to embrace or rather explore how intuition and our experiential knowledge can be used *as a resource in leadership and organisational change*. An integral part of this journal is our Accounts of Practice section, which demonstrates not only an articulated understanding of learning in action and inquiry but also the means to which practices are oriented and crafted as we engage and act in the moment. In this issue, we are presented with three accounts of how action learning is being used and developed within national services and international educational settings.

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