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REPORT

Report on the Action Research and Self-Study (ARaSS) Special Interest Group (SIG) at the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA)

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The Action Research and Self-Study (ARaSS) Special Interest Group (SIG) was established at a meeting held on Thursday, December 1, 2011 at the Missionvale Campus of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University during the 2011 Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA) annual conference. The ARaSS SIG focuses on all aspects of Action Research and Self-Study as practitioner-research approaches, which address social and educational issues.

At the introductory meeting, 15 people representing 12 higher education institutions in three countries—South Africa, the UK and Kenya—attended. Lesley Wood (NMMU), Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (UKZN) and Omar Esau (Stellenbosch) were nominated to form the ARaSS SIG committee. The co-ordinator has yet to be identified.

We introduced ourselves to each other and talked about the nature of action research and self-study, and agreed that we were dealing with a “broad church” (to appropriate Claudia Mitchell’s description of Self-Study at a seminar at DUT in August, 2009), in which there was room for many styles of action research and self-study. We agreed that there was room for useful discussion and debate, and that this would be a rich and meaningful exercise. We also talked about the characteristics of ‘courage’ and ‘generosity’ and cited examples of this in the research and practice in our experience in these areas.

We agreed that many of the functions of SIGS as identified by HELTASA could and would be addressed digitally through regular communication via three listserves/jiscmails:

- Action Research Africa Network, [ARAN@JISCMAIL.AC.UK],
- Practitioner-Researcher [PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER2JISCMAIL.AC.UK];
- Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) Masters and Doctoral Studies [TRANSFORMATIVEEDUCATION-ALSTUDY@JISCMAIL.AC.ZA].

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It was noted that members of SIGs should be members of HELTASA. Attendance at the annual HELTASA conference includes annual membership and all such people are automatically HELTASA members for the calendar year following the conference. Those who do not attend the HELTASA conference should pay annual membership subscriptions. The details of this are available on the HELTASA website.

An email was sent to all who attended the meeting, and to 46 more people representing another 10 universities in a further two countries. These people had all either expressed regret that they could not attend the meeting, or had expressed an interest in the establishment of the ARaSS SIG.

Public Action Research and Self-Study events to date

- Wednesday, November 30, 2011, 15.45–17.45, Room 510-0004, Missionvale Campus, NMMU: Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Joan Conolly conducted a workshop titled “Transformative Education/al Studies” with three participants from three different universities. With such a small number of participants it was possible to engage in a most worthwhile in-depth discussion about the challenges facing self-study practitioner-researchers, and the kinds of support that are available.
- Friday, December 2, 2011, 10.45–12.20, Room 503, Missionvale Campus, NMMU): Lesley Wood (NMMU), Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (UKZN), Mark Schofield (Edgehill, UK), Omar E sau (SU) and Joan Conolly (DUT) made brief comments about their perspectives and experience of action research and self-study to inform the topic “Improving teaching and learning in higher education through practitioner self-enquiry action research”. Eighteen attendees from nine higher education institutions participated in the discussion which followed. Questions asked provided an opportunity to address issues of rigour, relevance, authenticity, researcher agency, and social and educational impact.
- Sunday–Tuesday, March 4 –6, 2012, Room 202, Edgewood Campus, UKZN: “Transformative Education/al Studies” workshops were facilitated by Anastasia Samaras (George Mason University, Virginia, USA) and Mieke Lunenberg (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands) on aspects of self-study in teacher education, self-study for improvement of professional practice, and the role of self-study approaches as research methodologies. An average of 30 people from five higher education institutions attended the three-day workshop.

To receive communications about the ARaSS SIG, those interested are urged to join at least one of the three listserves/jiscmails: Action Research Africa Network, [ARAN@JISMAIL.AC.UK], Practitioner-Researcher [PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER@JISMAIL.AC.UK] and Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) Masters and Doctoral Studies [TRANSFORMATIVEEDUCATION-ALSTUDY@JISMAIL.AC.ZA].

We look forward to hearing from anyone who would like to contribute to our online ARaSS conversations.