Creating an online community of action researchers by Branko Bognar & Pascale Mompoint-Gaillard. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

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This book presents how an online community of action researchers was created and the learning of the authors and project leaders, Branko Bognar and Pascale Mompoint-Gaillard, and other participants in the Pestalozzi programme. The project and the book are described by the authors as follows:

> The action research project in this context was envisioned as 'taking a step forward' to develop further the comprehensive structure of the Pestalozzi programme that bases it's approach to professional development firmly into the realm of social constructivism and social constructionism, working together to create new practices, creating through the social interactions, situated learning in context and enriching individual learning through negotiation of meaning and interaction in a group.

> This book represents an example of such a project in which several practitioners from different parts of Europe gathered in the Pestalozzi community of practice, set out to learn how to become action researchers. As opposed to numerous books about action research in which authors intend to explain how to conduct action research; this book is an action research about becoming an action researcher. An additional feature of this book is the collaboration and learning of participants on an international level by using online social platform and affordable web applications.

> It is our wish to continue to improve our approaches to supporting teachers as agents of change, change for social good, based on a sound and explicit value system. This project in action research and this publication aims at helping the Pestalozzi programme's growth in this respect. (p.5)

The book fulfills this wish and offers accounts of the learning of the authors and participants in a practical and accessible manner. The book is organised into two parts; the first outlines the project and the second comprises accounts by four participants of their research.

The authors begin by introducing themselves and as they develop their account of the project their ontological values (the values that give their lives meaning and purpose) become clearer, as for instance when they say:

> Considering the fact that a number of authors participated in writing this book, each of us has included in it a part of own personal identity and value system. For all of us, freedom was the most prominent value. (p.6)

They outline and contextualise the project concisely in the introduction and then build a coherent argument in the section of 'philosophical and values background' towards the concluding paragraph:

> ... it is important to mention that we take care of internal cohesion of value background. Our values as aims "for the sake of which we struggle to give our lives their particular form" (Whitehead, 1985, p. 99) should be mutually coherent within a particular value system since only that way could they contribute to the harmonious creating of life (Vuk-Pavlović, 2007). It would be wrong to expect that this accordance could happen only through action. It is important to take care of the coherence of our values from the very beginning, and thus the philosophical backgrounds which we intend to fulfil in our practice. (p.13)

In the fourth section 'Action research, context, launching and challenges' we are introduced to the Pestalozzi programme and its educational intent as the context of the online communities of practice which draw together educators as critical friends working in diverse cultures and with various languages. We are given practical details of how the authors:

> ... tried to encourage participants to determine the goals of their action research by themselves based on autonomously selected values. In accordance with the goals set and specifics of their professional context, practitioners were expected to create activities to enhance their practice. In doing so, they were not offered any ready-made solutions but they mostly relied on their own ideas, many of which were creative at the level of psychological creativity. Also, participants were introduced to a variety of approaches to action research and they could choose the one that best suits their autonomously chosen values.(p.22)

In section 6 'action research process' we learn how the online communities of practice are established and developed and a sense of the ontological and relational values of the practitioners that are at the heart of their research into their practice. For instance, Pascale writes about the naming of one of the groups, '... I would like the name to reflect some of the values I hope our cooperation will embody: respect, authenticity, consciousness/mindfulness, empathy/kindness, sincerity, open-mindedness, love.' (p.26)

The brief resume of the history of Action Research offers nothing new. The absence of any reference to Living Theory research is puzzling as some of the researchers, including the authors, are clearly concerned with generating values-based explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the social formations within which they live and work, which is one of the distinguishing features of Living Theory research. Višnja Rajić, for instance, in her account, *'Action research approach to professional development in higher education: teaching a course on evaluation and assessment for prospective teachers'* (p127-165) describes and explains her research with respect to her ontological and relational values as her explanatory principles and standards of judgment, writing in her introduction, 'My own values that shape my understanding of education are the ones of democracy, emancipation and participation.' (p.129) And, '... we would like to promote values like freedom, creativity, empathy, hope and optimism that are not universal, but autonomously elected.'(p.163)

Ethical issues, the use of literature, various data resources, including multimedia, and the practical issues of creating caring and trusting relationships and communities of critical friends are addressed. There is an interesting section on the skills, dispositions and commitment of leaders and facilitators and the importance of developing a relaxed and convivial atmosphere. Finally the difficulties of getting reports written are outlined together with some guidelines:

> Since action research is the creative process I did not like to proscribe the "proper" way of writing report. Instead, I elaborated general principles that could be helpful for creating end assessing an action research account:
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> 1. It is important to describe and explain the professional context so that readers could imagine the conditions in which the action research was conducted.
> 2. It is recommendable to show how researchers fulfilled their values in action.
> 3. The action research report should show changes that were obtained.
> 4. The report should inform about problems researchers faced while carrying out the project.
> 5. It is advisable to present how researchers generated their educational theory and what they learnt from the research.
> 6. Action research report mostly does not finish with conclusions, but rather with new questions and it opens up new perspectives to build on the progress achieved thus far. (p.62)

Other ways for participants to present their research are also shown:

> According to my short guidelines and later suggestions Thomas and his students made an action research video in which they presented the most important aspects of their project (http://youtu.be/KdDVmVJ14sk). Creating an action research story from the students' perspective represents the main excellence of this video. (p.65)

In the last section of part 1 'Noticed problems, achieved changes and new perspectives' there is a thorough and critical review of how things had gone and the learning that emerged:

This was the pilot-project which aimed to explore possibilities of creating an online community of action researchers within Pestalozzi programme. We tried to prove that is possible to help practitioners from several European countries to become action researchers. We hope it is possible to conclude that education for action research cannot be done massively since it requires good organization and permanent support on almost daily basis that should be provided by experienced action researchers. Enthusiastic leadership represented the key word in carrying on this project. However, it would be wrong to expect that our experience could easily become common practice without systematic institutional support. (p.80)

We concluded that the main issue could be devising ways on how to educate new action research leaders who could help participants of existing Pestalozzi educational activities to become action researchers. (p.80)

Finally, the four accounts by participants of their research, in the second part of the book, enables the reader to understand what the project accomplished in contributing to the development of educational research and praxis by educators in diverse cultures and contexts.

As someone particularly interested in developing online support for educators researching their practice to improve it I found the work well presented and interesting and offered a lot of food for thought.