



Action research and integral futures studies: A path to embodied foresight

Joshua Floyd*

Melbourne, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 5 October 2012

Keywords:

Action research
Integral futures
Integral Theory
Participatory worldview
Enactive approach
Embodied foresight

ABSTRACT

Action research principles and practices have a long history of application in the futures field, and in recent years have seen a resurgence of interest. With the emergence of integral foresight and futures studies, action research takes on increased significance as a pathway to development of expertise in this new domain. This article outlines the essential characteristics of action research, and looks at how action research has influenced futures studies to date. It then explores in more depth the specific congruence between action research practices and the principles of integral foresight and futures studies. An approach to understanding expertise in futures and foresight practice consistent with the integral perspective is explored. This draws on the enactive approach to cognition and leads to a model of expertise described as *embodied foresight*. Action research is proposed as an important contributor to the development of embodied foresight.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Foresight and futures studies work is carried out in a world of increasing complexity and uncertainty, in which change occurs more and more rapidly. It is becoming clear to many in the field that conventional ways of considering “the future”, based on a worldview in which knowledge creation is a matter of recovering a pre-given, objective reality, are breaking down in the face of this situation. Responding to this breakdown, an alternate worldview is emerging in which “the way things seem to be” and the spectrum of possible futures thereby available to us are intertwined with the ways that we *are* as futures practitioners. The world disclosed by ways of sense-making consistent with the emerging worldview poses great challenges to practitioners’ expertise. Two critical questions arise in relation to this. First, in such a world, what might constitute *adequate* foresight expertise? And secondly, how can we *acquire* such expertise?

In addressing these questions, the aims of this article are:

- 1) To demonstrate that a pathway to the development of expertise commensurate with a world of the nature hinted at above can be found in the convergence of two unfolding waves of change in foresight and futures studies (FS). These waves of change are: the renewed embrace by the FS field of the family of practices and principles known collectively as *action research*; and evolutionary emergence of Integral Futures [1,2].
- 2) To explore *embodied foresight* [3,4] as a model for FS expertise suited to a *participatory world*, showing the relationship between the unfolding waves of change and this proposed approach to FS expertise.

* Correspondence address: 20 Ryan Street, Brunswick East, VIC 3057, Australia. Tel.: +61 3 9029 2178.

E-mail address: josh@joshfloyd.com.

By *participatory world*, I mean a view of the world, after Heron and Reason [5], that arises when we know that we are part of—and hence participants in—what seems to us to be going on. This understanding of one's world as *participatory* in nature arises within a participative worldview.¹ Reason and Bradbury [6, p. 2] argue that such a worldview is fundamental to action research: 'action research is participative, and all participative research must be action research'. As such, it marks action research as paradigmatically distinct from the four competing paradigms of inquiry—positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism—identified by Guba and Lincoln [7].² Of particular importance—and this will be drawn out in some detail as we proceed—the participatory paradigm joins critical theory and constructivism in moving beyond the assumption of an objective reality independent of us, the inquirers into that reality, but then reaches beyond these again with the proposition of a participative—or subjective-objective—reality 'co-created by mind and given cosmos' [5, p. 289].

Heron and Reason's participative worldview will take on particular significance as we consider the grounds for convergence between action research (AR) and Integral Futures.³ A central contention guiding development of the approach to practice introduced here is that Integral Futures and participatory action research (PAR) as articulated by Reason and Bradbury together offer not just a *useful* approach to futures and foresight work, but represent fundamental progressions towards *improved* FS work. This article will attempt to demonstrate to FS practitioners that AR, particularly as Reason and Bradbury present it as enacted within the participative worldview, will make FS more effective, and in doing so, offer a pathway to implementing the principles of Integral Futures, on the way to developing greater foresight expertise. This is a pathway that elevates FS practice from profession or career to creative life expression. It is axiomatic to the case presented here that this is what futures and foresight practice *should* become.

I commence presentation of this case by first confirming the commensurability of AR and FS on the basis of their stated foundational purposes. I then proceed to a description of the essential characteristics of AR, providing a basis for understanding the congruence between the AR and FS fields. Following this, the existing relationship between AR and FS will be reviewed briefly. I will then expand beyond this review to consider the nature of the *specific* congruence between PAR and the emergent integral stage of FS. Finally, I will conclude by looking at the nature of expertise in a world that gives rise to the integral perspective and will examine the role of PAR in developing this expertise. The term *embodied foresight*, introduced previously by Floyd, Burns and Ramos [3] and incorporating earlier views on ethical practice expressed by Ramos [4], will be used to characterise this view of expertise.

2. Action research and FS: commensurate purposes

Commensurability of the purposes underpinning each field's foundation is important for understanding the relevance of AR principles and practices to the FS field. While there are a broad variety of specific forms of practice across the AR field, there is strong alignment with regard to purpose. The various strands are all pulling in a similar direction. Reason and Bradbury, in their introduction to the *Handbook of Action Research*, provide a statement of purpose for AR that is representative of and consistent with views expressed by a wide range of participants in their field:

A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being—economic, political, psychological, spiritual—of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part. [6, p. 2]

Identification of a statement of purpose for the FS field that might be acceptable to all participants is perhaps more problematic. Superficially, it might be said that all in the field are pulling in a similar direction—"the future". However, Slaughter's [1] identification of traditions in FS suggests that there is significant difference with regard to the way that practitioners conceive their relationship with the future domain and the nature of the futures with which their work is associated. Nevertheless, Wendell Bell has offered a strong, unifying statement of purpose for the field:

The most general purpose of futures studies is to maintain or improve the freedom and welfare of humankind, and some futurists would add the welfare of all living beings, plants, and the Earth's biosphere for their own sakes even

¹ Reason & Bradbury use the terms "participative" and "participatory" more-or-less interchangeably.

² In characterising this distinction as *paradigmatic*, it should be noted that I use the term here in Kuhn's [8, p. 175] sociological sense of standing for 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community'.

³ In the introduction I have referred to Integral Futures using the capitalisation convention adopted by Slaughter [2] in the introduction to a special issue of the journal *Futures* (40:2) titled 'Integral Futures Methodologies'. For the remainder of the article, I will mainly refer instead to "integral foresight and futures studies" or "integral FS", although context will determine the appropriate convention in any instance. My intent in doing so is to recognise (a) the "integrality" in Integral Futures as potentially broader in scope than the contemporary articulation of Integral Theory by Wilber [9–15], without seeking to downplay the importance of this foundation for Integral Futures as originally articulated by Slaughter [1]; and (b) to recognise that integral FS is best understood as primarily emerging with a way of sense-making and being that can be characterised as "integral" [16,17], and that as such is differentiated from *particular* models of integrality in FS. In taking this approach, I also seek to acknowledge as legitimate—though this should not be taken to imply my *necessary* agreement with—the perspectives expressed in a special issue of the journal *Futures* (42:2) titled 'Epistemological pluralism in futures studies' edited by Inayatullah [18], responding to the earlier special issue of *Futures* (40:2) on Integral Futures Methodologies edited by Slaughter [2]. In the Integral Futures Methodologies special issue, Slaughter [17, p. 131] cautions that 'the success of any method brings with it a temptation to reify and over-claim, so regular reassessments are needed'. It strikes me that those of us seeking to further the integral FS vision would be wise to apply this to integral FS itself. Gidley [19] recognises the importance of this in the Epistemological Pluralism special issue, and the view has been reiterated recently by Morgan [20].

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1015610>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1015610>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)