Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) - democratizing reflective practices

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Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) – democratizing reflective practices

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The paper introduces a new approach to reflecting and acting called participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR). It explores its potential to enable individuals and groups to move forward, to improve their working practices and lives in particular communities and contexts. The paper situates PAAR in the historical context of participatory and action research and reflective learning. It suggests that using PAAR requires four strategic ‘turns’. By turn we mean a change in direction from one way of thinking and practising to another. The four turns are: (i) away from a preoccupation with changing behaviours in order to solve problems, with ‘fixing’ things and an engagement in deficit-based discourses, towards the development of appreciative insight, understanding the root causes of success and sustaining strengths-based discourses in order to amplify those things that will help build a better future from the positive present; (ii) away from self-learning (individualism and isolation) and towards collective learning through interconnectedness, appreciative knowledge sharing and the use of new forms of communications technology which enable simultaneous action in dispersed geopolitical spaces; (iii) away from one way of knowing and one perspective on truth to an acceptance of more pluralistic view of ways of knowing, of understanding human experience and putting this knowing to good use; (iv) away from reflective cycles and spirals and towards the use of a reflective learning (r-learning) framework comprising four mutually supportive processes. They are those of developing an appreciative ‘gaze’, of reframing lived experience, of building practical wisdom and of achieving and moving forward.

Keywords: participation; appreciation; reflective learning; PAAR; practical wisdom; lived experience

Introduction

Many of the practices in the general field of reflection are about individuals examining their own work so that they are more able to make wise and ethical decisions about how to improve what they do in a particular context. This is very much in line with the early work of Schön (1983), who celebrated the ability and motivation of individuals to understand themselves better and improve themselves and their work. He said that we needed practical knowledge to achieve this. In Schön (1991) we read that what practitioners looked at in their working life was framed as ‘puzzling’ or ‘strange’. This is still evident today. A customary starting point for reflection is that which we might refer to as a ‘problem’. In the earlier
work of Dewey (1933) we read that reflective practitioners learned by noticing and framing ‘problems of interest’. He said that if we experience surprise or discomfort in our everyday work then a reflective process was likely to be triggered. Dewey suggested that this process consisted of several steps. In his description of these steps we find such words as perplexity, confusion and doubt. Loughran (2006) looked again at Dewey’s notion of a ‘problem’. He suggested that although reflecting on problems is important, it should not be done at the expense of other aspects of our working lives. Loughran went on to state that if we use the word ‘problem’ we can easily get caught up with its negative connotations because it is so easily linked in our minds with words such as ‘mistakes’ and ‘errors of judgement’. Habermas (1974), like Dewey and Schön, also had plenty to say about reflective practices. The point we wish to raise here is that Habermas did not see knowledge generated by individuals in itself as being sufficient for improving social action. He believed it was necessary, amongst other things, to address the discursive processes which gave rise to certain discourses, which were more or less dominant and ‘heard’. The notion of reflective practices being understood as only being helpful in improving the knowledge ‘in our heads’ is not, we feel, an adequate justification for its use. Kemmis (2005) helpfully suggested that we need to look at a number of extra-individual influences on the improvement of practitioners and practices. He argued that ‘changing’ practice is not a matter for practitioners alone but a task of changing such things as the discourses in which practices are constructed and the social relationships which constitute practice.

So our general position in this paper is this; First, PAAR is a style of research. Secondly, we feel that when trying to improve work and working lives through reflective practices, thinking and conversations get stuck with vocabularies of human deficit and in doing so fail to unlock the creative potential of those involved. Deficit phrased questions lead to deficit-based conversations. These in turn lead to deficit-based actions. Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) is a style of research which requires us to use our appreciative intelligence to focus on the best of what is currently experienced, seek out the root causes of this, then design and implement actions that amplify and sustain this success. We are not saying that we turn a blind eye to ‘problems’. We are saying that PAAR is an approach where we accentuate the positive and look at ‘problems’ within a creative and appreciative frame and with a ‘critical spirit’. This means that achieving and moving forward does not have to be only about getting rid of what we don’t want, namely problems. Conversations and actions do not have to be only about ‘fixing’ things that are going less well, less than we had hoped for or expected. PAAR does not perpetuate the belief that weaknesses can, indeed, simply be fixed. PAAR requires a major shift in our mindset, away from reflective practices being only about problem finding, problem solving and about getting rid of ‘unwanted’ aspects of current practice, away from confessional tales and towards conversations about success, about understanding why particular aspects of our work are indeed successful, and how these joyful and celebratory aspects of practice can be further amplified and made more consistent. First and foremost it is about identifying and playing to our strengths.

Situating PAAR within action methodologies

We begin with a general overview. The practices of reflection are often explicitly associated with the different kinds of action research (AR) and with iterative action research cycles. In general, a view of AR is that its aim is to change something in a particular situation. This something is usually practice related. In other words, it is about behaviours and attitudes. For example, how the individual might change a therapeutic procedure, the way they listen to and learn from a patient, how they teach a class of children, how they provide a service...
for a customer, and so on. Action research celebrates the power of the individual to change their practice. It therefore focuses on the experiences and efforts of the subjective (Peshkin, 1988, 2001) and living ‘I’ (Whitehead, 2000). An action research process often starts with an individual practitioner reflecting on an aspect of their work and looking for areas where changes might be made. The focus of the action is often ‘framed’ as a problem or a concern. This conception of action research is, therefore, about reducing perplexity and discomfort, with a change process as ‘fixing’ and getting rid of problems. Put more positively, it is about trying to put our values into action and becoming more aware of the contradictions that often occur between what we say and do. Because of this emphasis, some forms of action research, but not all, can be associated with deficit-based discourses.

A conception of participatory action research (PAR) is that it builds on and extends this general view of action research. Fundamentally, it extends the ‘I’ to the ‘we’. Whereas the origin and ownership of the focus for AR resides within the individual practitioner/worker, for PAR the locus is within the collective ‘we’. But the ‘I’ does not become invisible. It is repositioned within the ‘we’. This is one thing that makes PAR so challenging. The ‘we’ has to be very carefully defined. Just as we bring different ‘I’s to any change process (e.g. a creative ‘I’, a questioning ‘I’, a radical ‘I’, a sceptical ‘I’, and so on), so also we bring different ‘we’s. Put another way, different groups of people (e.g. teachers, patients, families, social workers, nurses, doctors, managers, farmers) are likely to be participating in the process in different ways and at different times. More to the point, each participating group (or stakeholder group) may have different vested interests and intentions and want different outcomes from the change or improvement process. One aim of PAR is to make transparent the nature and influence of these different ‘we’s.

To be successful, PAR is dependent upon the authentic participation of those involved (Reason & Bradbury, 2007). It requires a degree of collaboration between them. An important characteristic of PAR is that it seeks to establish self-critical communities of people participating and collaborating in a change process, communities committed to enlightening themselves about the relationship between the current situation they find themselves in, action to improve this and the consequences of it. Additionally, PAR has an emancipating intention, one where participants liberate themselves from the institutional and personal constraints which limit their power to live by their legitimate and freely chosen social values. PAR is also a political process because it involves people in making changes that will affect others. For this reason it sometimes creates resistance to change, both in the participants themselves and in others (Hughes & Seymour-Rolls, 2000).

PAR is a convergence and coalescence of theoretical and practical traditions from diverse fields of human service work, like healthcare, social work, education, organizational and community development, agro-ecosystem analysis, natural resource management, and so on (Chambers, 2007). This is often attributed to two things (Kemmis, 2006). First, to the revitalization of communitarian politics and its association with participatory development, empowered participation and political activism (Botes & van Rensburg, 2000; Butcher, Dhungana, Pant, & Prasai, 2000; Lenneiye, 2000; Nakarmi, 2000). Second, to the apparent failure of some positivistic research and its assumption of universal applicability in new social, cultural and economic contexts. PAR has often been associated with methods that are visual and tangible. For example, ‘Maps and diagrams are made by local people, often on the ground using local materials … using earth, sand, stones, seeds, twigs, chalk, charcoal, paper, pens and other materials’ (Chambers, 2007, p. 7). Learning through conversation groups is a key characteristic of PAR.

The label ‘participatory and appreciative action and reflection’ (PAAR) is new and was first used by Ghaye (2005, 2008). We use it here to describe what we suggest is a necessary
development from more conventional forms of action research (AR) and from participatory action research (PAR) to a more explicitly ‘appreciative’ research style. PAAR synthesizes the best practices of action research (AR) and participatory action research (PAR) by adding a third and new dimension called appreciative intelligence. Like its forebears, PAAR is a systematic and rigorous style of democratic research concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. PAAR brings together action and reflection, with the participation of a range of stakeholders, in order to identify and amplify current achievements and to produce practical solutions in misalignments between values and actions. We ground PAAR in a view of the generation of knowledge informed by constructivism, critical realism, structuration theory, pragmatism and humanism. It is not simply about change. It is more about improvement and sustaining success by building on aspects of the positive present. We would argue that PAAR may be regarded as a kind of third generation action research. One fundamental way of distinguishing between AR, PAR and PAAR is by the nature of the key questions that each process asks. Some examples are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Some distinguishing questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of research</th>
<th>Example of key question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action research (AR)</td>
<td>What is the practical problem I need to address in my work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory action research (PAR)</td>
<td>What can we do together to change the situation here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR)</td>
<td>What are our successes and how can we amplify them to build and sustain a better future from valued aspects of the positive present?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some common ‘threads’ implicit in Table 1 and which are relevant to AR, PAR and PAAR are:

- who decides which form of research is appropriate?
- who participates and who is left out?
- whose problem, question or success is it?
- from whose perspective and which perspectives are left out?
- who decides what’s important to reflect upon and to action?
- whose reality is expressed, in what ways and why and whose is left out?
- who can access and use what is learnt and who cannot?
- who benefits and in what ways and who does not?

**First generation: action research (AR)**

Lewin (1946, 1948) coined the term action research (AR). In his original conception AR was a form of self-reflective enquiry, owned and undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social practices, as well as their understanding of those practices and the situations in which these practices were carried out. It was a kind of social action. One of the legacies Lewin left us is the general notion of the ‘action research spiral’ to guide practical action. This spiral contains four ‘moments’ (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McTaggart, 1996). They are reflecting, planning, acting and observing or fact finding about the result of the action. Upon further reflection new and improved plans emerge.

In describing aspects of PAAR we turn away from cycles and spirals and present a reflective learning framework (see Figure 2, p. 371). Additionally, we do not retain a focus on the centrality of the living ‘I’. PAAR is more about ‘we’ rather than ‘I, who the ‘we’ are,
what rights, roles and responsibilities they have and how these are discharged in particular circumstances. Also, PAAR does not have a ‘problem’ as its starting point. We know that people and organizations move in the direction in which they most frequently and systematically ask questions about. PAAR, therefore, deliberately and explicitly asks questions about what has or is working well and how to amplify this. It begins with an appreciation of strengths and successes (which we call an appreciative gaze), not weaknesses and deficits. This process is part of building an appreciation of the ‘positive present’.

Second generation: participatory action research (PAR)

PAR takes a participatory world view. This is a political statement as well as one about a theory of knowledge. It implies democratic peer relationships where participants affirm their right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them. In developing the approach called PAAR we have drawn upon some aspects of the work of Habermas (1972, 1974) to ground its aims in a deep understanding of ways to involve a range of stakeholders themselves in deepening their understanding of the relationships between their knowledges around well-being, livelihood and quality of life, workplace environments and their practices. By saying this, both PAR and PAAR challenge the division of labour between professional researcher-theorists and those being studied that is to be found in much conventional social research.

The PAR methodology is informed by Habermas’ (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests in its quest, for example, to improve the quality of life of people and communities. Within PAR there is a technical or instrumental (means–end) interest. In other words, the aim, for example, to deepen our understanding about how ICT might efficiently and effectively meet the expressed needs of elderly people. There is also a practical interest. In the Habermasian sense this means developing our skilfulness in making wise and prudent decisions to improve the well-being of particular participating groups. PAAR draws explicitly upon this latter interest and also embraces Habermas’ emancipatory interest. This makes PAAR a process that aims to support and enable people to free themselves from actions determined by habit, custom, illusion or coercion, which might be contrary to those wanted, needed, expected or desired by people themselves and others in their community.

Our conception of PAAR focuses on the ‘we’ and on the idea of knowing through relationships. By implication this requires users of PAAR to draw upon their social intelligence (Goleman, 2006). PAAR is an expanded view of PAR. Central to it are the processes of collective working and appreciative knowledge sharing (Thatchenkery, 2005). These have at least two significant associated processes. For those involved it is sensing how others feel or knowing what they might think. Some call this empathy or social awareness. The second associated process helps make the most of this awareness. It’s about being able to use this sensing capability to interact with others positively. More specifically, we suggest that those using PAAR need to:

- have a sense of attunement – the ability to pay attention to what others are feeling, saying and doing, listening to others and especially others’ points of view, even when these are different to our own;
- be aware of self-presentation – for example being able to behave in such a way that we do not alienate those we are working alongside, not being loud, demanding, self-opinionated or controlling, collectively presenting ourselves in a way that invites others to understand ‘where we are coming from’ and why;
use power to influence wisely – a central tenet of PAAR being that everyone involved has the right to influence the outcomes of particular social interactions and produce a desired social result;

- have a sense of attachment and bonding – for example an ability and preparedness to develop some collective capacity to trust each other to meet particular and group needs, to be kind towards and care for each other.

**Third generation: participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR)**

It is the explicit inclusion of the use of our appreciative intelligence that distinguishes PAAR from AR and PAR. In a nutshell, appreciative intelligence is about our ability to reframe a given situation and, in so doing, to recognize the positive possibilities embedded in it but not necessarily apparent to the untrained eye. It also involves action – the necessary action to positively engage with others so that valued outcomes unfold from the generative aspects of the current situation. It is situated in the field of multiple intelligences, something proposed by Howard Gardner (1993) in his book *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Gardner demonstrated that intelligence is not a single ability but a number of capacities. He based his view on findings from disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and cognitive science and from the biographies of exceptional individuals. Thatchenkery and Metzker (2006) argued that our appreciative intelligence is another type of intelligence within the multiple intelligence field. They proposed that there are three components of appreciative intelligence: the ability to appreciate the positive, reframe it and see how the future unfolds from aspects of the positive present. For this to happen we need to be persistent, have self-belief, have a tolerance of uncertainty and have irrepressible resilience.

Because the people we interviewed could reframe, appreciate the positive and see how the future could unfold from the present, they could see how their end goal was possible to accomplish. Thus, they were willing to persist and to believe that their own actions and abilities would take them to a successful conclusion. Because they could envision the way a positive future could unfold from the present, they could deal with the uncertainty that often accompanies a new venture … or a crisis. They exhibited irrepressible resilience, the ability to bounce back from a difficult situation, as the result of reframing, seeing what was positive in the situation, and understanding that a better future could come about despite a crisis or setback. (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, pp. 15–16)

**Appreciating the positive**

This refers to the processes of selectivity and judgement of some person or thing’s value or worth. It is about trying to see the best in people, their unique gifts, talents and qualities. An example of this in action is to be found in Melander-Wikman, Jansson, and Ghaye (2006). The paper was a reflective account of aspects of their collective interest in developing and sustaining ways that might enable elderly people to feel more empowered to exercise their right of self-determination. The context was that of home healthcare in northern Sweden.

To try to establish an appreciative disposition at the start of each day’s workshop they invited homecare staff, some of whom knew each other well, to engage in two activities in order to acknowledge that an appreciative disposition towards each other, their clients and their service would be needed throughout the day. They began in a circle inviting homecare staff to form pairs. Their invitation was:

Spend five minutes discovering something of the best about your partner. Use the time you have to discover something you most appreciate or admire in them. We will then be inviting...
you to share this appreciation with others in the room. So please check out with your partner how far they are OK with what you will say.

This activity was a way of trying to positively frame the whole day. It was a way of (re)grounding relationships (Chaffee, 2005). What was shared was astonishing, powerful, insightful, believable and humorous. One woman said: ‘I’ve been working with Sonia for ten years and I still can’t find anything positive to say about her!’ When the slightly nervous laughter died down she said: ‘Seriously, I want to say that Sonia can do things that I can only dream about. She is sensitive, creative and very good at her work.’

The second activity was even more participatory. All staff had to work together to achieve success. Eight string circles of different sizes were laid on to the floor. The invitation was: ‘When I say “Now”, please choose a circle and go and stand inside it, making sure both feet are inside the circle’. For the first two rounds there was more circle space than was needed for staff. They were spoilt for choice. Then for the next seven rounds the instruction was the same, but one string circle was taken away each time. As choice diminished, homecare staff had to make key decisions about where they were going to stand and with whom. They had to be creative in the way they made sure both feet were inside the circle. When there was only one string circle left the instruction was: ‘Now there is no more choice. Come together here, making sure both of your feet are inside the circle’. Some rushed into doing what they had done before, but they soon appreciated that they had to act differently if they were to achieve the task. They had to listen carefully to what was said. There simply was not sufficient room inside the circle for doing things the same way. Creative discussion, active listening, trial and error and partnership working were all in evidence. When they achieved the goal there was spontaneous applause, a valuing of a job well done.

**The process of reframing**

This key process involves having the skills to see, to make sense of and to interpret things in different ways. Not just one way, usually our own way. For example: understanding that an elderly person’s story can be interpreted differently by different readers; appreciating that a photo of a family holiday can convey both a feeling of topophilia and topophobia about a place and can conjure up different memories of it; looking at what a class of children have learnt from a lesson from different angles, e.g. from that of a teacher’s expectations and from what the children claim they have learned. Reframing is not about seeing the world through rose-tinted glasses, it is about actively trying to appreciate that we do not all see, describe and act in the world in the same way. Additionally, reframing is about choice. When we choose to pay attention to one aspect of, for example, an encounter with a child for the time being we are choosing to ignore other aspects of it. What we attend to is usually related to our values, in the sense that focusing on something implies that we value it. What we choose to ignore is in some way less important, less valuable or less interesting right now.

**Working from the ‘positive present’**

This component of appreciative intelligence is central to PAAR and is about seeing how the future unfolds from the present. For action-based, improvement-oriented methodologies this third element is a ‘must do’. It involves everyone considering the difference between what they feel they can do themselves and what they can do with help and support from others.
An implication of working from aspects of the positive present is that useful, desirable or positive aspects already exist in the current condition of people, situations or things, but sometimes we do not take due notice of them. Therefore, they must be revealed or unlocked. People with high appreciative intelligence connect the generative aspects of the present with a desirable end goal. They see how the future unfolds from the present. ‘Many people have the ability to reframe and the capacity to appreciate the positive. Yet, if they don’t see the concrete ways that the possibilities of the present moment could be channelled, they have not developed appreciative intelligence’ (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p. 7).

The positive core of PAAR

Figure 1 shows that we are suggesting that two of the defining characteristics of PAAR are that it is participatory and appreciative. This participatory characteristic (Jacobs, 2006) requires all involved to be reflective, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created and to see democratic peer relationships as an ethical and political form of inquiry that serves the practical ethos of improvement-oriented methodologies. The ethical and empowering dimensions of PAAR affirms peoples’ right and ability to have a say in decisions that affect their livelihoods and which claim to generate knowledge about them (Magnusson & Hanson, 2003). PAAR therefore positively embraces the connection between the way power is used and circulates amongst groups, on the one hand, and the way knowledge is generated and used, on the other (Thatchenkery & Chowdhry, 2007). The appreciative characteristic is critical because of the way some forms of action maintain a problem-oriented view of the world. In so doing they diminish the capacity of the participants to produce innovative ways of moving forward, demonstrating the use of their

![Some Characteristics of (PAAR)](image)

Figure 1. Some characteristics of PAAR.
Reflective Practice

imagination, increasing participant commitment and generating the necessary strengths-based dialogues required for sustainable improvement.

We are also suggesting that PAAR has the potential to be empowering and that it is conducted ethically (Appelbaum, Hébert, & Leroux, 1999; Duvall, 1999; Ghaye, 2001; Howard & Korver, 2008; Kidder, 2006; Melander-Wikman et al., 2006; Renblad, 2003; Stainer & Stainer, 2000; Wikström, 2005). PAAR actively draws upon the notion of empowered participation (Fung, 2006) and its associated process of deliberative democracy (Thomson & Gutmann, 2004). Together these demonstrate a commitment to positively engage with, and provide equal opportunities for, all those involved to participate directly in decisions that affect their own and others welfare. This participation is empowered because decisions generated by the processes of PAAR determine the actions of all those charged with the responsibility of building a better future from aspects of the positive present. The process of deliberative democracy is a crucial component because it affirms the need for all concerned to justify the decisions that are made. Arguably this PAAR process provides a different and better way of identifying, understanding and sustaining success. It is different for two reasons. First, because of the reason giving requirement of deliberative democracy. Second, because of the need to make reasons accessible and understood by everyone involved. It is also better because it moves us beyond simplistic views of ‘client satisfaction’ and the tokenism often associated with the term ‘client involvement’. Empowered participation, through deliberative democracy, means that all involved have a genuine sense of ownership and exercise responsible agency in the generation and use of knowledge. Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) also embraces the idea of reflective learners as skilful ethical decision-makers. Fundamentally this requires us to actively consider whether particular participatory actions and reflections (such as keeping a reflective journal as an assessment item for an award-bearing programme) are ethical or not. PAAR aligns itself with consequence-based ethics, associated with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. In other words, we feel that the actions which constitute reflective practices need to be judged on their consequences. We also feel that this is appropriate given the explicit improvement orientation of PAAR. Additionally, we would argue that those who use, or encourage others to use, reflective practices need to be accountable for their actions. It is easy to make praiseworthy but not livable ethical statements, to aspire to participatory and appreciative action and reflection that we cannot possibly meet. With PAAR we are simply trying to raise the reflective practice ethical bar, but not put it out of reach. In summary, PAAR seeks to establish and sustain ethical relational practices of the kind described by Einhorn (2006) and Meyer, Ashburner, & Holman (2006). To do this it draws from civic society, civic engagement and integrated service improvement research in order to sustain these practices (Cohen & Arato, 1996; Ghaye, 2007; Giddens, 1994; Griffiths, 2004; Habermas, 1996; Leadbeater, 2004; Marquand, 2003).

**PAAR and the power of asking appreciative questions**

Orem, Binkert, and Clancy (2007) talked about the power of asking appreciative questions. This is a key part of PAAR and, for some, a useful starting strategy. These are not just any questions, but questions that are carefully phrased in order to grab our attention, because our motivation to explore them supersedes whatever is going on at work right now. Here are some examples of the kinds of questions, with a strong appreciative (and reflective) tone, that we have in mind.

(1) What is giving you most joy and satisfaction in your work right now?
(2) What were you doing recently, in managing your time, that enabled you to use your strengths?

(3) What actions were you taking when you were successful at prioritizing those things that you are really good at doing?

(4) What was happening when you found yourself thinking, that really worked well?

(5) What did someone say or do to make you feel that your professional experience was greatly appreciated?

(6) What strengths do you feel you have to ‘fight fires’ at work? (fire-fighting is about constantly fixing problems and dealing with what’s urgent rather than what might be important).

(7) What did you do that prompted a colleague to say ‘thank you, it’s nice to be respected’?

(8) What were you doing that prompted a colleague to say ‘It’s great working here, it’s nice to be valued’?

(9) What did you say to a colleague that enabled them to say ‘thanks for understanding my situation’?

**PAAR as a process**

Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) is essentially an improvement process, as illustrated in Figure 2, and is set out as a reflective learning (r-learning) framework. This framework has been derived from two principle sources. First, from a meta-analysis of a large and compelling volume of evidence accumulated in the international journal *Reflective Practice*, for which a total of 627 papers have been submitted since its launch in 2000. Second, from the personal observations and work of the writers of this paper, which span 30 years of workplace practice in many different contexts. The r-learning framework is the practical answer to the question ‘so how do you actually do PAAR?’ Figure 2 shows that it comprises four essential, mutually supportive processes. These might be regarded as committed and intentional actions. They are as follows.

(1) Developing an appreciative gaze. This means actively and consciously starting the understanding and improvement process by looking at what is positive and supportive of human flourishing and well-being in current thinking and practice. It is an appreciation of our own and others’ gifts and talents.

(2) Reframing lived experience. This is essentially about trying to look at ‘problems’ (or challenges) creatively and with a critical spirit in order to seek out alternative and innovative approaches for future working. It involves being open to the unexpected connection.

(3) Building practical wisdom. This is about improving working practices through local and regional ownership of issues and an understanding of how gender relations and other markers of difference affect identity and behaviour. We need to organize carefully for this as building practical wisdom that is meaningful and useful takes time. The practical wisdom we have in mind is not simply the outcome of reproductive thinking; in other words, simply refining what is already known. It seeks to generate the new, insights and improved actions. In this sense we might call it productive thinking.

(4) Ethical action and moral courage to use what has been co-produced to demonstrate achievement and move practices and policy positively forward. PAAR is not only a particular way of thinking about action, it is also a particular kind of action.
Reflective Practice

Process 1. Developing an appreciative gaze

The influence of the work of Foucault and Peshkin and Bordieu’s ‘habitus’ has been helpful to us here, as has the perspective of critical realism. Critical realism and the work of Bhaskar (1986, 1989) ‘starts out from what is actually happening – not from what appears to be happening, or what our initially limited understanding leads us to believe is happening’ (Svensson, Ellstrom, & Brulin, 2008, p. 8). It helps us understand how power, politics and resources set limits to action, but also provide opportunities for new and more creative ones (Hemlin, Allwood, & Martin, 2004; Lideway, 2004). We have also drawn on more recent work on appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and appreciative intelligence (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). Interestingly, in a recent large world-wide survey of employees Rath (2007) found that only about a third of them could strongly agree with the statement ‘At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day’ (p. ii). Given how this connects with many aspects of what is called the ‘psychological contract’ we have with our employers (e.g. job satisfaction, going the extra step, voluntarily staying a bit later at work, putting that extra bit of effort into something, etc.), it is clear that there is lots of room for organizations to benefit by improving the alignment between individual and collective strengths and jobs. Seligman (2002) argued that using strengths to better advantage ‘makes work more fun, transforms a job or a career into a calling, increases flow. … Moreover, by filling work with gratification, it is a long stride on the road to the good life’ (p. 184).

Process 2. Reframing lived experience

This is a very important part of PAAR and is often difficult. PAAR aspires to build a better history from aspects of the positive present. Sometimes our vision is clouded in the stresses
and busyness of working life. Thus, seeing the positives in the present necessitates new forms of creativity and mental discipline. Here the work of Seligman (2002) on positive psychology and Giddens’ (1990) structuration theory have been helpful in clarifying our ideas and practices. Structuration theory is concerned with structure and agency. Giddens argued that these two views are incompatible with each other. He reframed them, describing how they were dependent upon each other. Structures evolve and are (re)produced over time and space. Agents in their actions constantly (re)produce the social structures which both constrain and enable them. One informs and transforms the other.

**Process 3. Building practical wisdom**

Czarniawska, (2004, 2007) pointed out that knowledge sharing today occurs in a net of dispersed and multiple, simultaneous contexts with the help of modern technologies. So building practical wisdom can happen in many places at once. Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002) spoke about embodied presence and response presence, the latter not necessarily visible to an observer, as when people ‘talk’ to somebody via e-mail or during teleconferences. In developing PAAR we have been influenced by the well-known notion of communities of practice, the perspective of pragmatism and Gramsci’s notion of changing the way people interact to build practical wisdom. Our position is that we do not need collected wisdom. Rather we need collective wisdom, a coherent integration of our diversity that is greater than any or all of us could generate separately, just as an orchestra is greater than the sum of its instruments. We would argue that PAAR offers us a way to generate a new kind of collectivity that does not repress individuality, diversity and creativity but that, instead, allows us to arrive at a creative consensus without compromise or coercion.

**Process 4. Demonstrating achievement and moving practices and policy positively forward**

To achieve this, PAAR does not ignore conceptions of the critical, as in critical theory, in order to understand how particular practices of control in contemporary workplaces and issues related to the familiar power–knowledge–subjectivity triad give rise, for example, to domination, suffering, dissatisfaction and alienation. This particular PAAR process is not about perfecting ourselves, it is about appreciating the consequences of positive collective wisdom and action. This process is influenced by radical humanism and the work of Freire (1970). We believe that achieving and moving forward will not be kindled by those involved spending all their precious time and resources searching for or talking about what is wrong, disappointing or unsatisfactory in their working life. We suggest that future action needs to be inspired by those things that participants feel are worth valuing, worth celebrating and sustaining. This might, in some cases, require some imagination. Maybe the toughest part of this fourth process of PAAR is simply letting go of negative stories of practice and alternatively working through the power of the appreciative question to trigger a more positive reflective practice.

**Towards a creative synthesis**

Table 2 is an illustration of how we might synthesize three key elements of our paper thus far. They are the appreciative question, the four processes of PAAR and the notion of moving from the individual towards more collective, participatory and democratic forms of action and reflection.
PAAR and a ‘critical spirit’

In developing PAAR we have been criticized for being overly optimistic in our disposition, almost utopian. We have been criticized for a lack of ‘critical edge’. We would argue that being creative and critical are not oppositional. They are not naturally antagonistic towards each other. Our position is that creative and critical thinking are different but they can (and indeed should) coexist and help each other. One way of looking at things is to see creative thinking as the ability to generate new ideas and to see things with fresh eyes. Critical thinking is the ability to judge the worthiness of these ideas and fresh ways of seeing. It is very difficult to generate and judge at the same time. If we are overly critical we can judge our ideas out of existence! The longer we can defer judgement, the more ideas we may come up with. So creative thinking is generative, non-judgemental and expansive. Arguably then, critical thinking is the yang to creative thinking’s yin. An important role for critical thinking (or critical reflection as we have come to know it in this journal) is to be analytical. By this we mean it serves the important function of probing, questioning and putting ideas under pressure. Second, it has a role in helping us to come to decisions and to make judgements; in other words, it helps us determine which ideas are worth pursuing. Finally, critical thinking helps us be selective, it helps us narrow down long lists of ideas, possibilities and options, it helps us make choices. We suggest that PAAR opens up the possibility for both creative and critical thinking to flourish.

Imagine a kayak paddle. One side stands for creative thinking, the other for critical thinking. If you always used the creative paddle, you’d go around in circles. If you always used the critical paddle, you’d go around in circles the other way. The key is to alternate between the two … that way you develop enormous forward momentum. (Hurson, 2008, pp. 46–47)

Therefore, it follows that PAAR is not insensitive to the perspective of critical theory and the way history, identity construction, power, politics and different discourses, for
example, affect the way we feel, think and can act in certain organizational contexts. This ‘interest’ manifests itself in a form of practice called ‘critical reflection’. What we are centrally concerned about with some expressions of ‘critical reflection’ is the way they seem to neglect or downplay the role of emotion and creativity in enabling individuals, groups and whole organizations to move forward. We are becoming increasingly anxious that some practices of reflection are becoming so analytical and rational that the intuitive, aesthetic, creative and affective are being crowded out. Much of the way reflection is assessed in the context of award-bearing modules/courses seems to bear this out. In short, we would suggest that with some reflective practices, being sensitive to the feelings of others is getting lost. We would wish to argue that we need to find an appropriate role for emotion in reflective practices, one which enhances and deepens understanding and improves action, a role that does not detract from building collective wisdom and acting with values in mind.

Reflective practices of one kind or another can and have drawn upon critical theory in a number of ways. For example, with regard to the nature and impact of ‘critical thinking’, ‘critical action’ and ‘critical reflection upon action’. The first is about the need to be able to adopt a critical frame of mind when appropriate. We may also call this a critical disposition. Arguably critical action is a collective capacity and capability to see ourselves and our actions in new and better ways and to do different things. However, we believe that a central concern of PAAR is to exercise a critical spirit that enables us, at the same time, to be optimistic and hopeful (Brookfield, 2000; Freire, 1994). The view of the importance of the critical self and collective reflection can be traced to the work of Schön (1991). He argued that critical reflection was essentially about the way we ‘see’ or ‘frame’ problems and challenges in the first place. It also involves questioning what might routinely be taken for granted and those actions which are perceived to be oppressive.

McCormack and Titchen (2007), in particular, and Higgs, Titchen, Horsfall, and Armstrong (2007), in general, suggested that the critical paradigm alone does not provide sufficient ontological and epistemological support for work that is concerned with fostering creative and transformational cultures of effectivenes and innovative organizing. PAAR is aligned with this view. PAAR, also involves praxis, defined generally as reflection followed by action. Within PAAR, praxis includes thinking and action that is not only about critical dialogue and contestation but which is also creative. To achieve the ambition of PAAR, praxis has to involve creative thinking, creative discourses and the making and taking of creative action. By implication, then, PAAR not only has an interest in the active role that people play in their own subordination, self-creation and self-fashioning, but in their emancipation and collective abilities to build a better future. It is therefore concerned with contemporary conditions and possibilities for developing a kind of communicative freedom that opens up fresh possibilities for working in the contested terrains that combat oppressive and limiting systems of thought. It is these that inhibit our capacity to imagine other possible ways of organizing. Second, PAAR offers some hope about how to move practices and policies forward, through the articulation of an alternative micropolitics of the workplace (Starkey & Hatchuel, 2002; Townley, 1994). Significant challenges for PAAR researchers are to encourage openness and, where necessary, reconfigure power relations to enable them to be played out with the minimum of domination. Third, PAAR can be put to use as part of a project for achieving an ethico-political objective. For example, at the heart of its reframing process are the acts of defamiliarization and the contestation of the prevailing ‘ways of seeing’ and organizing so that other individuals and groups might more freely and creatively represent what they truly feel and think. This may involve what Foucault called a politics of discomfort (Foucault, 1997). To think in this way is to be prepared to submit one’s convictions to close scrutiny and ongoing questioning, to be alert to their practical
ramifications, dangers and limitations and to be prepared to rethink accordingly. Using PAAR means that personal and collective values never settle into dogma. Using a critical spirit is not about dogmatic, authoritarian and judgmental critique, but much more about an appreciative attitude of mind, constructively aligned with a positive intent.

**How would we know a ‘good’ example of PAAR?**

Arguably, any ontological and epistemological stance on improving working practices and workplaces is potentially contentious. Therefore, it follows that there are no incontestable standards of ontological and epistemological judgement which can safely and ethically be employed. We suggest that a posture of eclectic pluralism is appropriate. So an important question becomes ‘What’s a good example of PAAR in action?’ This is complex and challenging. Arguably, one sensible starting point is to think of the way PAAR opens up communicative space. Placing this at the heart of the ‘standards’ or criteriology debate (Bochner, 2000; Schwandt, 1996) is to emphasize the inclusive, collective, democratic and transformative potential of PAAR, which transcends the self-interests of individuals. Habermas (1984, 1987) described communicative action as action oriented towards intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding and unforced agreement about what to do, when, with whom and why. He suggested a number of ‘validity’ claims which provide the beginnings of a platform for judging the ‘value’ of an example of PAAR. We suggest that the following seven ‘standards’ begin to respond to the question about the ‘value’ of PAAR. They are given in Table 3.

In this part of our paper we present four illuminations of PAAR in action. Each is an illumination of one or more aspects of PAAR as described in the first part of the paper.

**Table 3. Some standards of judgement.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some standards of judgement – how far is this a good example of PAAR in action?</th>
<th>Examples of appreciative questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inclusivity</td>
<td>How far have all interested participants, collectively, developed their appreciative ‘gaze’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotional engagement</td>
<td>How far is there evidence of participants being alive to PAAR as emotional work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understandability</td>
<td>How far are participants demonstrating a commitment to appreciative communicative action?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mutualism</td>
<td>How far is there evidence of the interdependence of creative and critical thinking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Transformation</td>
<td>In the reframing of emotions, understandings and practices, how far do ‘new angles of vision’ emerge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Communicative freedom</td>
<td>When building practical wisdom, how far is the process ethically and socially justifiable and sustainable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Moral courage</td>
<td>When moving forward, how far is there evidence of committed action to build a ‘better’ future from significant aspects of the positive present?</td>
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**Illumination 1. ‘Creativity in concert’ – enhancing learning through participation and appreciation (a contribution by Mosi Kisare and Philip Chambers)**

EASUN works to develop East African civil society organizations, where all men and women have equal opportunities to access and enjoy political, economic and social rights...
and to contribute their best for the development of organizations, institutions and society. More specifically, its central mission is to build capacities for the institutional growth of civil society organizations (CSOs) in East Africa by constructively enabling a positive alignment between organizational values, identity systems and practice. Advocacy for civil society development through networking activities, organizational development (OD) and community mobilization training and knowledge-sharing workshops make up 80% of EASUN’s work. The remaining 20% involves direct OD interventions to strengthen the capacities of CSOs to manage strategic shifts in governance, leadership, organizational culture and systems (www. easun-tz.org)

Richard is an EASUN Organizational Development Associate who lives and works in north-eastern Uganda. In June 2007 he organized a workshop for poor men and women farmers in Budaka County. Participants in the workshop used poetry, role play and dance to explore behaviours and attitudes that kept them from breaking out of their cycle of poverty. This was a challenge because community members had come with the expectation of only listening, as usual. Richard reflected:

I realised what a stranger I was to the people of my own community. As a stranger, I needed to engage people to participate in generating shared understanding and meaning around issues that affected their productive lives and their responsibility in it. This was done to great effect through the use of local stories, involving local characters and their experiences.

In March 2008 a four day workshop for EASUN staff, Organizational Development Associates and Apprentices and leaders of civil organizations was held in Moshi, Tanzania. The workshop process was an example of PAAR in action. PAAR was the practical means for learning new knowledge and skills. Working through the language of dance, for instance, enabled participating OD practitioners to visualize and feel processes that they normally worked with only at the conceptual level. A number of practices that are relevant to OD work were given greater form and shape through such processes as: (1) opening hearts and creating opportunities for deep listening; (2) inviting audiences to connect their experiences to current and future scenarios; (3) holding supportively together and then ‘letting go’ in the co-creation of meaning; (4) practice itself, enabling people to learn to relate and work through cycles of being, appreciation, action, reflection and learning, in order to constantly improve their humanity. The workshop came in the wake of EASUN’s growing interest in increasing its use of alternative language channels as the essential means of managing effective collaborative inquiry between consultants and clients in OD processes. How do you get the client to understand the organizational ‘complexity framework’ as a tool for diagnosing their organizational questions? How do you use the reflection–action–learning process, without making it a tiring intellectual exercise? And, fundamentally, how can you stimulate and sustain meaningful and authentic conversations about issues of significance to the client?

An important aim of this workshop was to break any acquired tendencies towards intellectualism and a dependency on the expert or a desire to control the outcome in the situations being supported. The PAAR process driven workshop was designed for interactivity and inspiration. The very first day of the workshop began with activities around ‘movement vocabularies’, which immediately got the participants out of their verbal linguistic channel. It was deliberately intended that the workshop try to steer away from conventional paper and pencil techniques and to broaden the repertoire of possible tools, skills and processes for the participants. Significantly and deliberately the workshop mostly used locally available resources, such as flowers, newspapers, buttons, flour, salt, bodies and voices. In the same context, participants were constantly engaged in discussing ways in which activities learnt in the workshop might be usable in their own contexts.
The workshop essentially aimed to put the following PAAR values into action:

- positive regard;
- relational awareness;
- appreciative interconnectedness;
- reality grounded action;
- action infused with a spirit of joy, optimism and hope.

The PAAR workshop programme (experiential framework) was deliberately built to provide four different, but complementary, ‘points of departure’. These were creatively explored across each day, as shown by the use of arrows (see Figure 3). Each of the first three days ended with some guided and supported ‘reflective space’, where participants themselves were invited to make connections and to capture their experiences. On the fourth and final day of the workshop the participants were given a chance to demonstrate their new learning through group performances. Figure 3 shows the structure and content of the whole workshop.

The workshop theme was based on the understanding that organizations develop and use different languages that generate patterns of behaviour and reflect their values. Within every organization there are more dominant languages associated with the use of power, people’s roles and responsibilities, needs and wants. There are also languages that struggle to gain centre stage, to be heard and appreciated. Such languages also carry the ability to express things that, for various reasons, we are not normally able to express through the conventional vocabularies of words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weds</th>
<th>Voices and Bodies ~ Myth and Mystique</th>
<th>Recovery break</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Recovery break</th>
<th>Reflective Space ~ Making connections &amp; capturing experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thurs</td>
<td>Tapestry and mosaic ~ Patterns and threads</td>
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<td>Reflective space ~ Making connections &amp; capturing experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Exploring text and Sub-text</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective space ~ Making connections &amp; capturing experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Creativity in Concert</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflective space ~ Towards a creative synthesis</td>
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Figure 3. PAAR workshop experiential framework.
In *Song of Lawino* the Ugandan poet Okot p’Bitek shows how, in losing his appreciation of African culture through the influences of Western modernism, Ocol, Lawino’s husband, lost his ability and opportunity to receive wisdom or messages mediated by the vocabularies of dance and song that were critical for managing relationships, as well as the economic and cultural development of the Acholi people. Lawino’s lament, based on her view that her husband did not value her anymore, is captured in the line: ‘My name blew like a horn among the Payira’. She was here reminding Ocol of her attractiveness and star quality in the Acholi milieu, not least because of the symbolic power she brought to the arena through her dancing abilities.

Language can raise questions around ‘what is being said underneath what is being said’, questions about ‘text and subtext’, questions about what we are really saying or what we are really communicating. There is an important insight, with regard to subtext, in a particular passage in Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino*. This is an extension of Lawino’s rebuke of her husband, quoted above, with regard to his apparent ‘abandonment’ of African cultural practices in favour of Western culture, which was becoming the new dominant force on the continent. Her husband was uncritically swallowing new religious practices, a new language and new dances in ways that, according to the lense of Lawino, made him a strange caricature.

In her response Lawino uses the imagery of Acholi dances to portray messages that were not always spoken but all the same had guided and safeguarded relationships, cultural meaning and the economy of the Acholi people. It is interesting that Lawino chooses to unpack this particular ‘subtext’ specifically when the culture that had served her well seemed to be threatened. She shares insights from her standpoint as a young woman who, in dancing, performs a seductive routine in search of a potential husband:

You dance naughtily with pride
You dance with spirit,
You compete, you insult, you provoke
You challenge all!
And the eyes of the young men
Become red!

The power of alternative language channels is beautifully revealed in Lawino’s warrior-like charge at *Ocol*, the husband who had become dangerous to the culture that had provided her with security and recognition. In the Moshi workshop different phrases heavily imbued with ‘subtext’ were experimented with in pairs using voice, body and space in order to invest them with different meanings and intentions. The phrases were in poetic language that tells it exactly the way it is, as in the examples from Shakespeare below:
Weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

or the unequivocal:

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

But can anything really ‘signify nothing’? Questions around spirituality and our value and belief systems and those of the organizations for which we work come into play. The use of participatory and appreciative action and reflection in OD can enrich our understandings of the ways power is distributed and strengthen participatory democracy. Arguably, culture tends to degenerate over time into unconscious processes that preserve the power of the conservative, non-transforming status quo. The ability of PAAR to help situations surface or speak the ‘unmentionable’ while building collaborative relationships can help promote cultures of participation in organizations and social development generally.

**PAAR activity 1. Bodily awareness, focus and space**

An empty space was created but for pairs of chairs placed at random. The participants were invited to sit, then asked to remain completely still. Attention was drawn to the different ways in which they were seated. Arms could be folded or held in laps, legs may be crossed or feet planted firmly. Focus was then brought into the equation. Were the pairs sharing a common focus, looking at each other or looking elsewhere? All of these observations were designed to address the bodily awareness necessary to develop and work expressively with a movement vocabulary.

**Composing**

The participants were asked to devise a simple sequence in which they moved independently of one another and together. The materials with which they worked were the gestures and spatial awareness to which attention was drawn at the outset. These could be repeated or developed and put together in simple combinations so that, for example, the folded arms unfold and either fold again or come into some other relation with the body. A piece of music is played to accompany what was emerging as a slow, mesmeric movement sequence. This helped frame the movement work of the pair, one of whom was given a cue to stand and take a circuitous route away from their partner, finishing standing behind them and touching them gently on the shoulder.

**Performing**

An opportunity to practice the routine was provided. This enabled the pairs to work on the clarity of their sequence, to develop an appreciative sensitivity towards one another and to hone their expressive and technical skills. This building of awareness of how we present ourselves to others is akin to Boal’s (1992) vision of the theatre as the art of looking at ourselves.
Appreciating

The pairs observed one another. The emphasis upon gesture (kinesics) and spatial awareness (proxemics) comprised a semiotic (Elam, 1980) or sign system. The generation and exchange of meaning which arose from this enabled a collective wisdom to be co-constructed, with the facilitator asking questions and guiding the discussion.

PAAR activity 2. Mime into dance

The space was empty again, but this time the participants surrounded it and were asked to work with a partner on the task of entering the space together and traveling on a curving pathway. All pairs were asked to finish facing the same way and were required to remain alongside one another throughout the sequence. There was also an emphasis upon walking neatly and in good posture and maintaining a meaningful relationship throughout.

The pathway was repeated until all were familiar with it, while spatial awareness became critical if the pairs were not to collide with one another. Having polished the sequence, the pairs were asked to perform it one more time and then learn:

He dressed himself in coat and hat.
He put on shoes, and after that
He even brushed and curled his hair,
Then sat himself in grandma’s chair.

Each pair was then asked to create a mimed action to accompany the words. Again the pairs were invited to work side by side and to face the same way. Next the pairs were asked to perform only the actions so that the rhythms came from the chosen movements and not the words. This was further exaggerated and a dynamic dimension added when the participants began to play with the movements cooperatively, abstracting them by making them smaller and larger, faster and slower and stronger and more delicate. The participants developed and polished their sequences, working through a repeated, circular, rhythmic pattern which was potentially never ending. Accompanying music was played. The group dynamics that were generated were positive. Cooperation, communication and enjoyment were experienced (see Figure 4). They were dancing!

Figure 4. Mime into dance.
**PAAR activity 3. Thirty second theatre**

Four volunteers were asked to stand on the stage in front of the audience. No one was allowed to speak and at any given time one person had to stand, one sit, one lean and one fold their arms. In addition, no one was to hold one position for more than 20 seconds. This activity can last for 3 minutes. The volunteers improvised with one another, changing position and bodily attitude, watching one another closely, appreciating expressions of interaction, interconnectedness and building rapport.

The activity was followed by observations from other workshop participants (the audience). For example, they were asked if anyone appeared to be in control or had tried to trick the others. The participants were then invited to make any observations and to speak about connecting and mediating with one another, a requirement for building a collective wisdom. Everyone was then asked to work in small groups. Each group was given a title pertaining to organizational development, such as ‘transformation’, ‘change’, ‘resistance’ and so on. They were asked to work on creating a 30 second scenario in movement, minimizing the use of the spoken word. The intention was to use the scenarios as ‘lehrstücke’ or ‘learning plays’ of the type devised by Brecht (1964).

**PAAR activity 4. Bodies and voices**

Sitting in a group and reading a local newspaper in a chorus of Swahili and English might not appear to be the most obvious way of developing appreciations and understandings. And yet.

To begin the participants familiarized themselves with a short passage which they read together, with normal speaking voices, then soft, then loud, then fast, then slow. The resultant cacophony created a language of its own and pairs were able to work with these sounds to conduct strange and amusing conversations. As well as improving active listening skills this also served as a transition into an exercise in what Brecht (1964) referred to as ‘verfremdungseffekt’ or ‘defamiliarization.’ In line with this, the participants were increasingly invited to see the familiar (the words in a newspaper) in a completely different way.

Voicing only the vowel sounds O and A, but otherwise reading a passage to themselves, the participants were invited to stress the use of the resonators. The voice sounds were thus amplified and then modified by introducing pitch and volume. The overall effect was a harmonious and resonant chorus. Working with consonants the articulators came in to play and the voiced sounds produced a harsh staccato, clipped rhythm. This was in complete contrast to the harmonious vowel sounds produced by the resonators. An appreciative atmosphere was created.

**PAAR activity 5. Appreciating the languages of colour and pattern**

In the spirit of keeping our OD practices simple but powerful, grounded in local realities and connecting with the concrete not the abstract, we deepened our understanding of the idea that with colour comes a language. Certain colours, like red and green, can convey particular meaning. Other colours like yellow and blue may say something about particular feelings. We inhabit a world of colour and colours can form a pattern. We explored these things in our local environment and within our own lived experiences. We observed the colours on lizards and birds within the hostel grounds where the workshop was being held. We looked at the use of colour and pattern in local advertisements, in organizational logos and in local food brands.
The idea of making a tapestry using coloured paper woven together into a pattern was used in the workshop to deepen our appreciation of how each participant felt as an OD practitioner and how they wished to develop in their practice (see Figure 5).

At first glance each tapestry looked different. Many tapestries served as metaphors to help participants express how they felt as OD practitioners. Some tapestries expressed growth in one way or another. Some a journey with crossroads. Other tapestries were cleverly used to depict tensions within OD practice, such as between fluidity and stability, between control and freedom and between structures that empower and those that suffocate.

Through discussion and reflection those involved began to use the tapestries to deepen their appreciation that there were ‘similarities within our difference’, that although each tapestry ‘appeared’ to be different, they were sometimes, different expressions of some more generally felt experiences and values. This was a significant thing that all learnt. Many felt that if we ‘imprison’ ourselves inside one language, only certain things may be revealed. If we broaden the language channels, other things have a chance to present themselves. The creative challenge was then to appreciate both points of difference and points of similarity in each tapestry. One participant said ‘If we change the colour we may change the story. Change both the colour and the pattern and we create an opportunity to transform the story’.

**PAAR activity 6. The mosaic eye**

Mosaic has a double meaning. First, it was used to mean the way individual pieces (of something) went together to create a picture. Second, it was used as a metaphor for the way we ‘see’ the world, because how we ‘see’ the world affects what we feel and think and, therefore, what actions we might take. A mosaic eye is different from a vertebrate or human eye. The human eye is a single organ. Our eye is mobile and can scan the environment. However, in the case of butterflies, ants and bees, for example, their eyes are compound eyes. Compound eyes with hundreds or thousands of fixed micro-eyes each presenting a view of some part of the environment. The idea of creating a mosaic was to actually ‘make something’, but also to explore how we might use the mosaics to ‘see’ many and different things. Through this particular PAAR activity participants were invited to create a mosaic to depict their understanding of the process of ‘transformation’. The activity started with each participant creating a hand-sized tile, made of locally sourced (wheat) flour and salt. After that participants used recycled coloured plastics of different shapes, sizes and forms to create images that (in colour and sequence) would communicate their own views of transformation. Some examples of the mosaics and the process of their creation are shown in Figure 6.
Here are Mosi’s reflections on the mosaic eye activity.

I constructed a good tile, like everybody else. I looked forward to creating a beautiful mosaic, portraying my understanding of ‘transformation’. With enthusiasm, I put layer upon layer of coloured buttons onto the tile. As the moist tile filled up, with no room left for a single additional button, I tried to move it in order to bring it into the sun to dry. To my horror, the mosaic started to collapse.

I put my tile out in the sun and went for lunch with some colleagues. Richard looked at me and observed that I was not happy. I explained that this was because my mosaic had collapsed. Jared, looking amused, as if holding something he had known all along, joined the conversation with the suggestion that maybe there was major learning there for me.

The following morning, as we looked back on our experiences of working with the vocabularies of colour and pattern I stumbled upon a particularly powerful lesson for me. I learnt that my challenge had been about working effectively with symbolism, which required simplicity in presentation.

Working on my mosaic the previous day I had only four items which, placed in appropriate sequence, would depict what I wanted to share about transformation. Represented in colour and shape, these included a ball of cast iron, fire, a magic wand and a rainbow. I only needed to organize these symbols into an appropriate sequence of relationships in a simple way that would enable those looking at my mosaic to participate in the meaning making. Instead, the mosaic had collapsed because I had attempted to colour it with my full intellectual understanding of transformation.

**PAAR activity 7. Creative gaming**

Arguably the purpose of OD as an intervention process is to increase an organization’s capacities to appreciate what its strengths are, to know how to amplify these and to have the moral courage to improve those things that will contribute to a ‘better’ future. This involves sharing, making connections and acting through openness, creativity and collaboration. This PAAR activity juxtaposes winning and losing, those of ‘playing’ (working) alone or playing as a team and those of risk assessment (whether to take a chance or not) and safety (playing more conservatively). A game was described to participants as a goal-driven set of behaviours, controlled by rules.

In discussing the nature of this activity the participants quickly framed the question ‘I wonder what will be the most important rules of the game?’ Two separate work teams were
established and invited to design a game for each other to play. The design itself included the creation of rules that would shape behaviour, communication and relationships in ways that ensured the teams would show creativity and collaboration in playing the games. One of the teams created a game with 13 rules, while the second team’s game had only 3 rules (see Figure 7).

An important reflective question that emerged afterwards was ‘In what ways did the number or nature of the rules make a difference?’ Many of the participants noted that the games brought to mind the challenge of what counts as an appropriate ‘enabling’ structure. These questions arose in discussion. ‘How much structure do you need to achieve specific results?’ ‘In what ways is structure helpful, or could it at times be a hindrance?’

Illumination 2. Building ethical learning communities in pre-schools and schools (a contribution by Ulrika Bergmark)

The curricula for pre-school and compulsory school in Sweden states that education should promote learning in different subjects while also assisting students to develop into citizens of good character. Ethics pervade all activities in educational settings (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1994, 1998). To achieve these goals a programme, ‘Full of Value’, was undertaken with children from 1 to 16 years old in a school area in northern Sweden. This school improvement process aimed at enhancing the quality of education by integrating the study of ethics into the curriculum. This has strong psychosocial and physical environment aspects and affects everyone’s interpersonal behaviour, teaching methods and learning styles and the subject content and examinations. This particular school area wished to develop and sustain ethical learning communities in pre-schools and schools. In such communities it is important that children’s views and thoughts are listened to and taken seriously (see Figure 8).

There is also an ambition that both children and adults will reflect and learn together and to do this respectfully and with empathy in order to enable children to grow as humans and learn new knowledge (see Figure 9).

A total of 200 teachers and 1500 children are involved in this ongoing improvement process, which is facilitated by people from a local university and an international social
enterprise. ‘Full of Value’ includes in-service training for teachers, improvement work together with children and also research with teachers and children in this school area. In the following I will present and discuss two examples of how PAAR has been used with teachers and students within this school context.

**PAAR activity 8. Show and share**

A show and share activity was used during a workshop with 30 school staff (for further reading see Bergmark, Ghaye, & Alerby, 2007). Before this occasion the staff were invited to bring an artefact to the workshop that symbolized every child being valued in their preschool or school. The aim of the activity was to explore positive experiences of caring for children in education and thus acknowledge teachers’ valuable work with children. During the workshop teachers showed their artefacts and shared their reasons for bringing this artefact. Two examples of what teachers said during this activity follows. Here are extracts from field notes taken at the time.

The golden box is a box where we teachers in my pre-school write appreciative words on pieces of paper to each child. All papers are put in the box and at certain occasions we draw pieces of paper from the box and read them out loud for the children. I think that ‘the golden box’ has been a success among the children. They are really looking forward to the moment when the box is opened and they have the opportunity to hear these appreciative words about themselves or their mates.

The cell phone is a tool for me as a secondary teacher to stay connected with children’s homes and parents. The connection between me, as the teacher, and the parents is a way of showing that every child matters to me. I feel that it is important to call home both when there are bad news as well as good news. My experience of calling home when there is good news is that the parents are surprised that they get a phone call from the school even though there are no problems with their child. I believe that the parents really appreciate these good-news-calls.
Another activity, storytelling with storyboarding, was used with students in a Grade 8 class (for further reading see Bergmark, 2008). They were asked to remember and write down situations when they had experienced being treated with respect, appreciation and recognition by other people. The aim of the activity was to explore students’ positive experiences of being treated well in order to find out how to amplify these positive experiences in school. Here are some examples of what students wrote at the time.

I get encouraged almost every day or I get compliments from a lot of different persons. It can be different compliments, from that they notice that you have cut your hair, to when you have new clothes.

If you get a good grade in a test, the teacher or the classmate that sits beside me can say: ‘Wow, well done! You are so good!’

I thought it was very funny that she asked me if I wanted to paint a large picture together with her. It felt good that she thought about me.
After writing down situations of respect, appreciation and recognition they discussed ways of transforming words into action. In other words, how to create a respectful and appreciative community in school. The students were asked to come up with positive suggestions and activities which could be used in their class. Their suggestions were written on a shared storyboard (see Figure 10). Examples of practical actions were collecting money for a class trip, playing ‘cooperative games’, staging a theatrical performance and producing films.

So how do these activities represent the spirit of PAAR in action? The activities in the programme ‘Full of Value’ involved components like reflection, appreciation, action and participation, in which all those involved discovered and addressed common successes, needs and concerns. Staff expressed such feelings as that building ethical places and spaces proceeds slowly. But they learnt that activities such as the two presented here can fuel a change process. They were inspired to undertake further work when what they had done well was acknowledged. During class activities the students learnt to appreciate being treated respectfully, which sometimes could be taken for granted and thus not noticed. The activities were appreciative in the sense that they focused on building and sustaining ethical relationships in school and also on amplifying positive experiences of teachers and students. Ghaye (2008) spoke about a positive force for change where appreciation plays an important role: ‘The need to develop cultures of appreciation where current strengths and achievements (the “positive present”) form the basis for an improved future’ (p. 25).

The curriculum for Swedish compulsory schooling (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1994) emphasizes that students should have opportunities to develop the basic values of society. Accordingly, I suggest that education must include participation and action in order to improve ethical relationships and behaviours. It is not enough to talk about ethical issues in pre-school and school. Both education and educational research ought to create opportunities for teachers and students to reflect on their practice in order to find out what works well and which aspects can be improved. This perspective on change stresses teachers’ and students’ work together with school leaders—striving for the same goal (Andersson & Carlström, 2005; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Peacock (2006) suggested that school improvement is ‘underpinned by the ethic of everybody, trust and co-agency demands that the whole community is given a voice and that dialogue takes place enabling progress that is both positive and enabling’ (p. 257).

The conclusion is that the values and activities within PAAR have the potential to build ethical learning communities in pre-school and school. PAAR also enables staff, students, parents and significant others in the school’s community to reframe a given situation, and
in so doing to recognize the positive possibilities for improving the quality of learning and teaching in school.

Illumination 3. Health promotion with children (a contribution by Catrine Kostenius)

In the process of writing my doctoral thesis I worked on an international research and development project called ‘Arctic children’. The overall objective of the project was to develop a supra-national network model for promoting psycho-social well-being, a positive social environment and security for school-aged children in the Barents Sea area. The international network consisted of universities and organizations from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. This cooperation across borders tried to utilize the resources in the Barents Sea area, as well as integrate research and practical work related to the health and well-being of children and youths (Ahonen, Kurtakko, & Sohlman, 2006). The aim and context of my research was to create a new understanding of health promotion activities in the classroom as seen through a child’s perspective. My study was conducted in the spirit of PAAR.

The rationale for using PAAR was multiple – the participatory foundation, the relational awareness, the positive regard through appreciation and the reality grounded action. Doing health promotion with children instead of doing research on children carries a value of empowerment (Kostenius, 2008). Empowerment can be defined as by Melander-Wikman (2007) as a process focusing on human rights and the capacity to actively participate in and influence our own lives. PAAR is often referred to as research of the people, by the people and for the people (Ghaye & Melander-Wikman, in preparation). Relationships to other people are in focus, connecting empowerment and the spirit of PAAR. Another reason for using PAAR was its focus on building positive and enabling relationships through appreciation (Ghaye, 2008). The children aged between 10 and 12 years that I have met have pointed out that relationships are important for their health and well-being (Kostenius, 2008). PAAR can, therefore, be a useful process when carrying out research with children to empower them and keep them healthy during the process.

PAAR activity 10. Talking pictures

I spent time in a classroom of Grade 4 students in a suburban school in a city in the northern part of Sweden. The classroom teacher asked the children to creatively think about the meaning of well-being and lack thereof. She made a mind map of the words the children came up with so that all the children in the class could see their ‘collective picture of thoughts’ on the whiteboard. The words from the mind map were written down on pieces of paper by the teacher, folded and placed in a bucket. The children were asked to pick a word from the bucket and then make a drawing symbolizing the word they picked (see Figures 11 and 12). The children could decide to work alone, in pairs or in a group. If the children picked a word that they felt did not inspire them sufficiently to make a drawing they picked another piece of paper until they found a word they liked to work with. The words the children chose to work with were joy, friendship, togetherness, love, stress and anger. They worked on the drawings over two days and finished up with a picture exhibition, hanging up all the pictures on one wall of the classroom. The child or group presented their drawing first, followed by a discussion where the children were invited to offer interpretations of each other’s drawings. I took notes while the children offered their thoughts on the exhibition and their comments were considered a first step in the process of developing deeper appreciations of their psycho-social well-being.
The children offered their lived experiences through drawings and put words on their own and other’s drawings (Figure 13). Words the children used represented both good and bad. Some words were positive, such as: ‘respecting each other’, ‘keeping secrets’, ‘having fun together’, ‘summer’, ‘caring’, ‘honesty’ and ‘happiness’. Other words were very different in kind, such as: ‘tough’, ‘scared’, ‘feeling sick’, ‘stress’ and ‘being angry’.

The children’s lived experiences of well-being and lack thereof, in drawings and text from the discussion on the exhibition, enabled us to develop three appreciative themes. They were: (1) friends in good times and in bad; (2) the sunny side of life; (3) the bad and the mean. Relationships were regarded as central to the children’s lived experiences. With this in mind, the three themes came to be collectively captured by the phrase ‘Friendship is like an extra parachute’.
To engage with children in health promotion efforts within school and more generally when working with children in social research of one kind or another I feel they need to be positively involved. By this I mean taking their experiences seriously and building on from that (Save the Children, 2003). The children I met experienced friendship as something important for their health and well-being. I have often wondered how we, as adults, make use of this knowledge when meeting children in school. To promote health and well-being in organizations like schools, I believe in the importance of appreciation, appreciating what children themselves regard as ‘being healthy’. Health promotion is about finding out what ‘good’ health means and building on that to promote it (Kostenius & Lindqvist, 2006). One of my experiences when doing research with children was their positive attitudes when dealing with challenges in life, for example when coping with stress (Kostenius, 2008). According to Ghaye (2008) appreciation can be a positive force for change. I agree with his point that there is a need to use the positive present as a base for an improved future. PAAR is, according to Ghaye and Melander-Wikman (in press), ‘appreciative in the sense that it seeks to build and sustain positive and ‘enabling relationships’ between all those involved in order to create more possible and improved futures’ (p. 9). I believe that using PAAR can make healthy research with children possible, hopefully resulting in feelings of health and

Figure 13. A children’s drawing symbolizing happiness – ‘a girl with glittering eyes’.
well-being as well as positive learning experiences. It can very well be an opportunity for a win-win situation, empowering children while gaining more knowledge about how to create and sustain health promotion in school.

Illumination 4. Appreciative conversations about ageing well (a contribution by Sue Lillyman)

As part of an international collaborative project that aimed to develop an appreciation of ‘ageing well’, members of the European team, supported by small grants from the Daiwa and Sasakawa Foundations, recently visited Japan. One of the main activities was to conduct appreciative conversations with small groups of Japanese elders to try to understand from them the links between ageing well and how this might be achieved by amplifying aspects of the positive present (Meyer, Heath, Holman, & Owen, 2006). One of the conversation groups is shown in Figure 14.

The participants were responsible for running and organizing activities not only for older adults, but also intergenerational activities. These included running the local scouts groups, sign language, first aid, flower arranging, playing dominoes, dancing, calligraphy and other community orientated projects. Each person sat on the floor in traditional Japanese style and enthusiastically shared their thoughts with their peers, developing appreciations of each other. As part of the conversation we asked the older adults two questions. The first was ‘What were three things that they looked forward to as they grew older in their society?’ The second asked them to reflect on three things that concerned them as they grew older. This presented us with opportunities to explore reasons why and strategies for securing and amplifying feelings of positivity. We also had the chance to talk about what might have to change (or indeed for some what was changing anyway) in their lives to realize these hopes.

The conversations with these elderly participants centred around three things. Looking forward to ageing well was linked with: (1) physical well-being and, especially, physical mobility; (2) social well-being and, especially, maintaining good social networks; (3) psychological well-being and, especially, being able to satisfy their ‘hungry spirit’ and feel happy. Together we shared the joy of asking and responding to questions like: ‘what is it

Figure 14. An appreciative conversation about ageing well.
that gives you most joy and satisfaction in your life right now?'; ‘what makes a great day?’; ‘how do you have fun in your life?’ They talked about this for hours! On further reflection we came to an understanding that conversations of this kind require positive connection, mutual attention and empathy. It’s a skillfulness underpinned by our capability to use both our appreciative and social intelligences.

A concluding thought

If we change the questions we ask we have a chance to change the conversation we have with others. If we change this we create an opportunity to change the action. However, there are many barriers to realizing these intentions. In Table 4 we try to end on a positive and hopeful note. Table 4 takes the four processes of PAAR, sets out a major challenge to each of them and offers some ‘barrier-busting appreciative questions’ that might help individuals, work groups and organizations achieve and move forward.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic R-learning intentions</th>
<th>Potential barrier to realizing the intention</th>
<th>Barrier-busting appreciative questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Developing appreciation</td>
<td>Failure to ‘feel’</td>
<td>Think of an occasion when you felt valued by those you work with. What do you need to do to feel this way again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reframing lived experience</td>
<td>Failure to ‘see’</td>
<td>Think of a moment when you realized ‘Hey, there are other ways to do or understand this’. What do you need to do to experience this again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Building collective wisdom</td>
<td>Failure to ‘share’</td>
<td>Think of a time, at work, when you could meet, talk and learn with your colleagues. What do you need to do to create this time again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Acknowledging achievement</td>
<td>Failure to ‘move’</td>
<td>Think of the last time when you were supported in your efforts to move your knowledge and skills forward. What do you need to do to achieve this kind of support again?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes on contributors

Tony Ghaye was born in a small fishing village in the south-east of England and had a blissfully happy childhood. I could swim almost before I could walk! By the age of 10 years I knew more about fish, the sea and the beach than I did about writing, mathematics and reading. I could say that these early experiences of living, playing and appreciating what happened at the boundary of land and sea has influenced my thinking and action greatly throughout my life. I have always loved working at interfaces. I have come to regard these as creative, emergent and fascinating. Also tensioned, unpredictable and sometimes a bit dangerous. I have worked in practice and studied at the Universities of London, Birmingham and Worcester, UK. I am the founder and Director of the not-for-profit, social enterprise Reflective Learning–UK (http://www.reflectivepractices.co.uk). I am also a Visiting Professor at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden and the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the international, peer reviewed journal Reflective Practice. I now regard myself as an organizational strategist. Most recently I have worked extensively at the interface between personal and organizational development in emerging and developed countries and in public, private and third sector organizations. I am a member of NorAforsk, (Nordisk Senter for Aksjonsforskning og Aksjonslæring) and the senior international consultant for BGU in Beijing, China. I am also the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the international, peer reviewed journal Reflective Practice, a company which offers future-oriented perspectives that have the potential to improve work, workplaces, lives and livelihoods. My enduring commitment is to try to build and sustain work teams and organizations that act creatively, ethically and with moral courage.

Anita Melander-Wikman has an M.Sc. and Fil Lic. in physiotherapy and will this year defend my doctoral thesis about ‘Ageing well and mobile information and communication technology’ at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. My research interests lie within the field of the empowerment of elderly people and rehabilitation. The focus of my research is to explore elderly people’s needs and experiences of empowerment dimensions as self-determination, mobility and participation in relation to rehabilitation. The focus is also on how mobile ICT can support them. My intention is to bring forward the client’s perspective. I have a lot of experience of physiotherapy practice, working in neurological rehabilitation. I have been working at the university’s Division of Health and Rehabilitation as a Lecturer since 1997. I have also been involved in several e-health projects, such as the ‘MobiHealth’ project within the European Union fifth framework programme, ‘e-home health care @north calotte’ and presently ‘The My Health@Age Project’.

Mosi Kisare was born in Shirati, a small fishing village community on the north eastern shores of Lake Victoria. I never grew up in my own cultural setting. My father was a preacher, bible school teacher, lecturer and principal of a theological college and later on a Bishop of the Mennonite Church in Tanzania and Kenya. Growing up next to my fathers’ undertaking(s) made me some kind of wonderer as well. I attended college in the USA, receiving a bachelor’s degree in psychology, with a minor in economics, in 1976 from Goshen College, IN. I also received a master arts degree in rural social development from the University of Reading, UK, in 1979. I have been involved mostly in development work, first through project promotion – working for the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) from 1976 to 1981. In 1982 I joined the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) based in Nairobi, Kenya, where I developed and headed its research and development consultancy service up to 1994. I joined EASUN at the end of 1994 as a Programme Officer, then became its Executive Director in 1998. I trained in OD consultancy work in South Africa from 1995 to – 1997, through OD training programmes organized by CDRA (Community Development Resource Association), an OD specialist organization based in Cape Town. Since then I have been involved in leadership and governance transformation in East Africa through training civil society organizations in facilitative and transformational approaches to leadership and community development.

Philip Chambers is a Senior Consultant in Creative Arts with Reflective Learning–UK. Previously I worked at the University of Worcester, UK, where I led the modular postgraduate professional education programme. I have worked in a number of European, Indian and African contexts, using the power and potency of reflective learning to improve individual and team work. I have chaired the Reflective Practice Thematic Interest Group for the European Teacher Education Network’s annual conference for five years and was joint founder of the International Reflective Practice Research Group in 2001. My research and teaching interests emphasize the importance of the self, the concept of narrative and the lived experience paradigm. Central to this approach, in the areas of both research and teaching, is risk taking and the challenging of orthodoxies. Such a creative approach emphasizes
innovation, new perspectives and the potential, resultant, unanticipated outcomes. I use a range of experiential methods, derived principally from my background in dance, theatre and drama, to encourage individuals and work groups to appreciate both their gifts and talents and how to address personal and professional growth points. I have published widely in the area of personal professional development and have participated in a variety of initiatives, in both developed and emerging nations, around personal effectiveness, group work and leadership. I am also interested in the links between working life, working ethically and organizational development.

Ulrika Bergmark is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Education, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. The focus of my research is exploring school work as ethical practice. This involves appreciating how teachers and students experience ethical situations in school and how teachers and students work together to enhance their learning through an ethical attitude. My research interest lies within the field of ethical issues in schools, behaviours to each other, care, student influence and learning from each other. My research is conducted within a school improvement context in Northern Sweden, called ‘Full of value’, where work is done to develop ethical learning communities in preschools and schools.

Catrine Kostenius is a mother of two teenagers and an assistant professor in the Department of Health Science at Luleå University of Technology in Sweden. I hold a doctorate in health science. I was born and grew up close to the Arctic Circle in the northern part of Sweden and my professional background is in child health care with special interest in health education for children. I co-founded the Health Guidance programme (Hälsovågledarutbildning) and I teach health promotion classes. My recent articles have focused on health and well-being from the perspectives of schoolchildren in the arctic region of the world.

Sue Lillyman has over 30 years of experience working in the NHS in the UK and in education. During this time I have worked in a variety of fields within clinical nursing and specialize in caring for older people. I also recently worked for three years as a volunteer in Peru with street children, taking medical teams along the Amazon River managing and delivering care to remote villagers. I currently work as a Senior Lecturer at Birmingham City University where I am the route director for the post-graduate certificate for case managers, caring for patients with long-term conditions and module leader for the undergraduate nursing programme for caring for older people. I am engaged in research relating to the experiences and perceptions of older adults around the world and those receiving community care in the UK. Additionally I am a director of Age Concern, Gloucestershire, a trustee of the charity Nurses Reaching Out and an associate consultant of Reflective Learning–UK. I have published widely in the field of reflective practices in healthcare.

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