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The Audacity of Understanding and Improving (the) Practice (of action research)

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Audacity:

Boldness or daring, especially with confident or arrogant disregard for personal safety, conventional thought, or other restrictions. (dictionary.com)

➢Audacity in doing AR "out of the box"

➢(More relevant to my purpose here is the) Audacity in talking about (and reflecting upon) AR (to improve is effectiveness)

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In this presentation, I will ...

➢ Make some observations about action research in the Philippines

➢ Remind us what we already know about action research and its purposes

➢ Identify some implications on how to achieve them

➢ Posit some challenges for those involved in action research and its promotion

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First, about my perspective
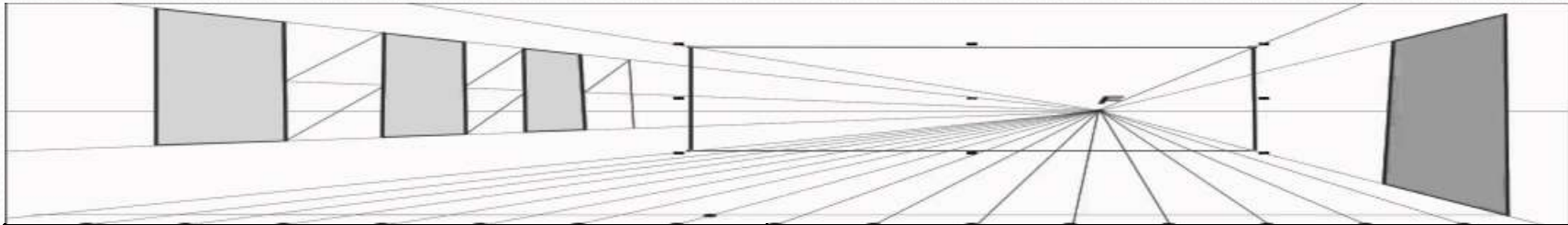
(I am) an Insider	(But also) an Outsider
I share a commitment for developing action research in the country	However, I lack deep knowledge of the history and context
I (can) make observations and identify challenges from working with many teachers	I could be wrong! It is sufficient that my comments provoke (internal) discussions

Observations

Dilemma of Action Research in the Philippines

➢ (it is) Encouraged/demanded by all teachers as a professional development

➢(However, it is) Not accepted by some universities as proper research at masters and doctoral levels – (in other words) it does not measure up!

➢The there is significant similarity within AR projects in the type of questions, methods and formats and between them and traditional research at university – i.e. (limited) focus on certain types of measureable learning

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Traditional research focuses on …

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD
(and its practices)
Generate theory/knowledge

Or

IMPROVING THE WORLD (and its practices)
Achieving quality, inclusivity and relevance

What do I mean by understanding?

I would consider somebody (a teacher, eg) have understanding of their practice if they can

➢Identify important factors in the world and how they interact

➢Identify a range of desired outcomes and their failure (not only low level learning, but high order thinking, critical thinking and creativity)

➢Develop language / theory to explain the world (and its practices)

➢Be able to talk about it and defend it publically

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What do I mean by improving practice?

I understand practice to be wider than mere actions and processes we do day to day. (Improving practice in this context means)

➢ Improving practices to achieve a wide range of desired outcomes

➢ Improve the conditions of our practices

➢ Achieve social justice outcomes of our practices. (For me the desirable aim of improving education is not measured only by increasing the mean performance – but asking who is excluded and not benefiting – ie the inclusivity as well and quality for all students)

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(on the other hand) Action Research focuses on ...

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD
(and its practices)
Generate theory/knowledge

IMPROVING THE WORLD (and its practices)
Achieving quality, inclusivity and relevance

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Implications of the dual focus of AR

➢ Action without reflection is blind, reflection without action is impotent (Freire)

➢ Action without reflections is a mere technique; Reflection without action is speculative

➢ Professionalization (of people in the practice – eg teachers) implies **both** having control of action through understanding – and developing understanding through reflection (not only data) on action

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➢ Judging the "goodness" or (AR) projects is **not** to be measured by correspondence to the outside abstract world (ie. validity/reliability and generalisation are not the important criteria to evaluate AR, but demonstration of changes and understanding is!)

➢ It is **not** learning by being objective detached scientist **but** learning by reflection on subjective and localised practices. (The development of individual teacher of their assumptions, students, context and what they do is integral part of AR)

➢ As research, it is useful for others and should be shared, **but not** as generalizable knowledge **but** as means to aid their reflection on their practices

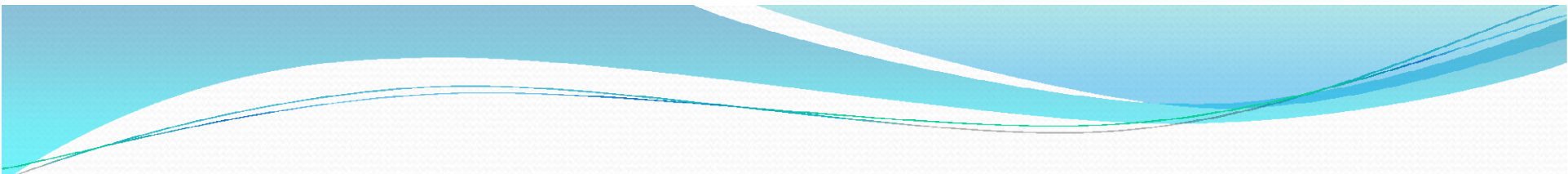# To achieve this dual focus, AR needs ....

➢ A commitment to (a wide range of) important desirable social and learning outcomes – including HOTS, **21**C skills, and social justice in practice

➢ The use of a variety of (research) methodologies to achieve those outcomes

➢ Be informed (by a) wide variety of (contemporary) theories of practice (and teaching)

➢ Demonstrate the resulting understanding of practice (by participants) and its improvement

➢ (Enabling the practitioners to initiate their own inquiry out of the box of regulation and traditions)

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Challenges

Is Action Research Colonized by Limited Views about Academic Research

➢ Is the focus on language and processes of academic research mystifying action research and driving it away from the language and processes of practice?

➢ Is the standard (limited) criteria for judging traditional research making action research not acceptable in many universities (for higher degrees)?

➢The regulation and formalised of action research in schools may lead to the "form" becoming more important than the "substance" of understanding (and improving) of practice?

➢Are common action research projects in the Philippines limited in the vision of what are desired outcomes (a mere focus on low level learning outcomes)?

➢Is the heavy focus on measurement and quantitative methods limiting the scope of outcomes to low level thinking and traditional skills?

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Questions, Comments and Contestations

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