

Natural Inclusion and the Extended Epistemology: re-approaching an established action research paradigm with a new philosophy

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Alan Rayner is co-creating a new philosophy of “Natural Inclusion” which poses an entirely new ontology. Here, what have been perceived by western cultures as discretely bounded entities (material, relational and completely definable) separated by void or dead space, are in fact local thickenings of a continuous dynamic existence comprising distinctive bodily and energetic flows as natural inclusions of receptive space. Once this simple and profound idea is grasped, perception, semantics and qualities of being and becoming transform.

Susan Goff has long used Heron’s and Reason’s Extended Epistemology in her participatory research strategies (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason in Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Heron and Reason in Reason and Bradbury, 2008). For example, the Extended Epistemology informed the research strategy for the National PAR project exploring best practice community crime prevention (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003); to support the take up of participatory evaluation in a local council initiative; and currently to inform a multi-site PAR strategy in partnership with the Nous Group delivering to state government department.

The Extended Epistemology is described by its authors as an “up hierarchy” which recognizes the intrinsic and inalienable value of Experiential Knowing, and moves through three additional, emergent levels of dependent, while also autonomous, forms of knowledge. The Presentational form is drawn from the Experiential, expressed as strongly interpretist knowing (painting, poetics, kinetics such as mime for example), the Propositional form “proposes” models and theories in everyday practice, returning the practitioner to Experiential knowing and the founding form of knowing in the cycle. As a construct of knowledge generation it is both democratic and liberating, recognizing many forms of knowing which relate to individual and culturally distinctive knowledge making practices. Does it however, overcome the problem of instrumentalism?

Alan is interested to open the fluid, governing context of Natural Inclusional to playful engagement with the Extended Epistemology. This catalyst workshop will begin with an overview of the Extended Epistemology. The approach will be experiential so that participants “feel” the emergence of knowing through the four stages. We will explore an enjoyable topic, our experiences of “natural kindness” at the Congress, by moving from reflections on experience, to mime, to co-create a shared model, to applying the model with each other in the first half of the workshop session.

From this base, Alan will introduce “Natural Inclusion” through dialogue and demonstration. He will shift the practice orientation of the workshop to an improvised, rather than prescriptive approach, to being in knowing. He will emphasize how “natural kindness” arises from the “natural inclusional” and a truly indigenous sense of being an “in-habitant” of the natural world, not an independent observer or controller

of it. Each quality of the up-hierarchy's knowing will be felt within the other, reorienting our sense of time and presence, our understanding of "coming into knowing" and what "knowing" is. We will revisit the experiences of our chosen topic, (eg "kindness") within this reorientation, noting the subtle, simple and yet huge scale of reorientation that Natural Inclusionality creates.

We intend to conclude our session with a collaborative enactment of the differences we experienced. The intention of this workshop is to enable Congress participants interested in Alan's astounding ontology to understand its workings and potential in the world. It is a first step to fluidizing ontologies, consistent with Alan's vision. It is also an experience in shifting the quality of structured knowledge creation practice with different philosophical frameworks: in this instance Constructivism and Natural Inclusionality.