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Participatory Action Learning and Action Research for Sustainable Learning in a Higher Education Context[1]

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Abstract

Traditional methods of instruction are prevalent in university settings, yet they may not effectively foster sustainable learning. Sustainable learning promotes student teachers to become lifelong learners and adapt to an ever-changing educational landscape in initial teacher education. This study explores participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) as a philosophy to challenge traditional methods of instruction. As an initial teacher educator, it is my responsibility to model effective pedagogical practices to my students. This responsibility includes engaging in ongoing self-reflection to enhance my teaching methods. To enable this process, a self-study research design was employed to reflect on and improve my pedagogical practice and ultimately, contribute to the development of my student teachers as sustainable learners. A memory drawing was utilised to reflect on my childhood experiences as a learner in traditional classrooms, and the perpetuation of these traditional methods of instruction in my present practice. This reflection highlighted contradictions between my current pedagogical practices and the PALAR philosophy. The findings reveal that reflecting on past experiences highlighted the need to re-examine my worldview for personal transformation to occur, and the role of adopting the PALAR principles for pedagogical change. PALAR and self-study approaches offer valuable insights into educational research, each emphasising action and reflection at individual and social levels, resulting in transformative thinking. Student reflections on the module supported the findings of the study. By proposing PALAR and self-study as complementary, this study makes a unique contribution, and is capable of disrupting traditional methods and promoting more sustainable learning.

Keywords: participatory action learning and action research, self-study, sustainable learning, traditional teaching methods

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Introduction

Traditional University Teaching Versus Sustainable Learning

Traditional methods of instruction in the form of lectures have been the norm since the university's inception in the Industrial Age, and these outdated methodologies need to be revisited in the ever-changing higher education arena. Numerous researchers (Freeman et al., 2014; Kay et al., 2019; Klein et al., 2023; McCullough & Munro, 2018; Murphy et al., 2021) have concluded that participatory teaching approaches are more beneficial than traditional methods of instruction. Traditional methods of instruction are not just lecture-based teaching approaches where the educator is a primary source of knowledge and students, passive recipients in the classroom. A prescriptive curriculum content and design and instructional methods and forms of assessment (Athiemoolam, 2018) may also be indicators of this. McLaren (1998) stated that these prescriptions emphasise a version of more important knowledge, dictate what knowing something entails, and prescribe how people should construct representations of their world. Various studies concerning the enabling of student voices have noted how greater student participation magnifies their motivation, identity development, meta-cognitive abilities in the learning and teaching process, self-authorship, and an improved result in assessment (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018). Hence, the values and principles promoted by universities need to shift from traditional transmissive approaches towards pedagogies that enable students' voices, value prior learning, and foster greater student engagement.

Sustainable Learning in Education

Sustainable learning in education is an emerging concept that is easily confused with learning about respect, renewal, or recycling of environmental resources. According to Graham et al. (2015), sustainable learning ensures that learning is accessible to all students, and that teaching is relevant to the context and culture of the students. Scholars such as Ben-Eliyahu (2021) and Hays and Reinders (2020) have especially emphasised that sustainable learning continues despite adversity, and across various contexts. This is significant in initial teacher education because it prepares teachers to embrace and accommodate diverse learners in their future classrooms. Teachers plan and prepare lessons that are contextually and culturally relevant to their learners. Also, as lifelong learners themselves, they understand that education is not confined to the classroom or a specific period of life, and that they can adapt their teaching to accommodate the rapid changes in the present educational landscape (Fidalgo & Thormann, 2024). Hence, in teacher education, the concept of sustainable learning aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2017), in which initial teacher education is not just geared towards preparing students to complete their degrees but enables them to contribute positively to the lives of their future learners and eventually make a positive difference in society.

PALAR as an Approach to Learning

Aligned with the above goals for positive social change, participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) has been widely recognised as an emerging research design in the action research genre. Various researchers (Damons, 2017; Luthuli, 2019; Neethling, 2015; Setlhare-Kajee, 2018) have concurred that PALAR provides a framework, methodology, and philosophy to conduct ethical research resulting in positive, sustainable change in society. PALAR has also been recognised as an approach to promote community engagement, which is a critical civic responsibility of ethical university scholarship (Zuber-Skerrit, 2015). Furthermore, PALAR has been theorised as an approach to facilitate democratic postgraduate supervision in the context of higher education (Wood & Louw, 2018). Unfortunately, to date, little has been written about the potential of PALAR to transform and improve higher education pedagogy in initial teacher education. Therefore, this article brings to light an initial teacher educator's pedagogical transformation after using PALAR in her academic journey.

The Central Principles of PALAR

PALAR's central principles are underpinned by a transformative paradigm that questions the dynamics and power structures involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Hence as PALAR researchers, we first ask ourselves how truth and reality are shaped, whose knowledge is considered valuable, and how valid knowledge is constructed. To assist PALAR researchers, Kearney et al. (2013) identified a structured model that outlines the three R's (relationships, reflection and recognition), which are interwoven with the seven Cs of PALAR (critical reflection, competence, communication, compromise, commitment, coaching, and collaboration).

Many PALAR projects have emphasised the importance of the first R (relationships) in PALAR (Luthuli, 2019; Luthuli & Wood, 2020; Neethling, 2015; Setlhare-Kajee, 2018). Setlhare-Kajee stated that it is during this critical initial step that respect is fostered, which assists with collaboration between the participants. Participants buy in and establish commitment when sound relationships are built. However, it is important to note that relationship-building occurs throughout the process and involves sharing and coaching to improve the skills of the action learning group (Damons, 2017). During the interactions, participants compromise by listening with greater empathy and reaching mutual agreement. Hence, sound dialogical communication is vital to establish relationships in the learning and research process. Wood (2020) emphasised that there needs to be respect for individual goals, and that the collective goals, purposes, and expectations for the project's future must be clearly established. Hence, I surmise that it is through the building of relationships that PALAR becomes a more humane way of doing research.

The second R (reflection) enables people to turn the mirror upon themselves as an inner gaze (Mortari, 2015). According to Zuber-Skerritt (2018), reflection is necessary for the design, implementation, learning through, and evaluation of a PALAR project. That author clarified that by reflecting on the research process,

participants learn about themselves and others, the knowledge they have co-created, and the requirements for further action. PALAR thus interrogates current ways of thinking and can be a tool for personal transformation. Argyris and Schön (1978) described single-loop learning, which involves surface reflection on operational improvements and double-loop learning, which questions underlying assumptions and goals by reflecting on why something happened. Building on these ideas, Wood (2020) recommended triple-loop learning, a rare phenomenon that extends the previous two levels of learning to deeper reflection. Triple-loop learning considers diversity issues and contextual dilemmas that produce a deeper level of reflection (Hummelbrunner, 2015). This deeper level of reflection thus assists individuals and groups in transforming themselves, enabling them to adapt and thrive in complex and changing environments.

The third R in PALAR is the recognition of participant voices and competencies (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). Firstly, recognising that all human beings possess potential, and that the ultimate aim of education is for all to achieve this, is crucial to the principle of recognition. Facilitators foster recognition by encouraging all participants to express their viewpoints and perspectives during PALAR discussions and activities, thus creating a climate that values and embraces diversity. This recognition is also known as epistemic democracy where the legitimacy and authority of all voices must be acknowledged (Foucault, 1977; McAteer & Wood, 2018). Hence, multiple perspectives and local epistemologies must be recognised, thus supporting the collaborative construction of knowledge (Damons, 2017). For learning and research to be impactful and transformative, PALAR also emphasises that all aspects of being human need to be activated. The head, heart, and hands model enables PALAR to be a well-rounded learning experience that prepares individuals not only to understand information cognitively but also to engage with it emotionally and apply it practically in meaningful ways (Wood, 2020). This is a holistic and balanced approach to learning and research that unites the head, heart, and hands or a combination of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning.

Theoretical Perspective

Paulo Freire's (2005) critical pedagogy theory aligns with the transformative agenda of PALAR. Freire's central belief was that education can promote positive change among students and students can, in turn, become active agents of change in their communities and beyond (Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2019). His principles of humanising pedagogy, reflection, and dialogue are relevant to this article. Firstly, humanising pedagogy highlights the role of authentic relationships in education. Zinn and Rodgers (2012, p. 87) claimed that "teaching and learning happen in relationships—with oneself, with others, and with the world." This translates to educators establishing caring, respectful, and empathic relationships with students where they feel valued, heard, and supported in their learning journeys. Students' humanity and dignity are thus recognised, and they are active contributors of knowledge rather than passive recipients

(del Carmen Salazar, 2013). By focusing on the human aspects of teaching, the teacher must be fully present and communicate openly (Zinn & Rodgers, 2012). According to research, these meaningful connections with students create a sense of belonging and trust and improve their interest and academic achievements (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Santos et al., 2019). Humanising pedagogy thus promotes an ethics of care, respect, and inclusion that can galvanise students to challenge the status quo actively.

Secondly, to enable critical reflection, Freire's (2005) *conscientização* [conscientisation or critical consciousness] involves developing an awareness of social structures perpetuating oppression and inequality in education. By developing conscientisation, students are encouraged to reflect on their lived experiences critically, question dominant ideologies, and recognise their agency to effect social change (Darder et al., 2017). The ultimate aim of critical reflection is thus for students to gain a deeper understanding of power dynamics and systemic injustices, and engage in transformative actions leading to a more just and equitable society.

Thirdly, Freire's concept of horizontal dialogue between students and educators is essential for democratic pedagogic practice (Bohórquez, 2020), where the educator must be open enough to learn while teaching (Abraham, 2014). This is in rejection of the banking model of education, where those who supposedly possess the knowledge "deposit it in the heads of learners" (Bohórquez, 2020, p. 128). In opposition to banking, learning should involve problem posing, asking important questions, challenging children to shape their destiny and ultimately, challenging the status quo (Cappy, 2016; Nols et al., 2019). Teacher virtues such as "respect for children's knowledge, autonomy and cultural identity; rejection of discrimination; humility; joy; knowing how to listen; openness to dialogue; and caring for people" (Nols et al., 2019, p. 729) contribute to critical and humanising pedagogy.

Research Methods

In line with Freire's (2005) transformation agenda, this article, aims to present my pedagogical transformation following my learnings from adopting PALAR principles in my scholarship. The research question investigated was: "How did I transform my pedagogical practice following using PALAR in my scholarship?" Self-study is an emerging research design that encourages educators to improve their professional practice by reflecting on and analysing their pedagogical approaches (Kortjass, 2020; Loughran, 2004; Pithouse-Morgan, 2022). Dinkelman (2003, p. 9) stated that self-study is not the entirety of teaching, but it "mirrors and systemises that part of pedagogy that is reflection." By self-reflection, individuals can learn more about themselves and identify areas where they can improve (Campbell, 2017). Hence, self-reflection is imperative in self-study given that I need to reflect on my past experiences to contemplate and change my present pedagogy.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research methods provide rich opportunities for researchers to engage creatively and deeply with their experiences. According to Samaras (2011), engaging in arts-based inquiry can spark deep reflection and significant insights into professional practice. Arts-based research offers a creative and therapeutic means of representing our feelings that words cannot express (Culshaw, 2019). Hence, arts-based research can be a catalyst for self-reflection and critical analysis to improve pedagogical practice (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Drawings also recognise the connection of the human hand and mind by capturing and conveying one's thoughts visually and creatively (Toadvine & Lawlor, 2007). As a teacher educator interested in reflecting on my pedagogy, a memory drawing assisted me in reflecting on the principles of PALAR in relation to my pedagogical practice. In addition to enabling the process of reflection, memory drawings effectively make us aware of how our past experiences can impact our present pedagogical practice as teacher educators. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) stated that without reflecting on our past experiences in the classroom, we can perpetuate the teaching methods of our own educators—often adopting their negative aspects in our own pedagogical practices.

Data Generation and Analysis

To begin my memory work, I adapted the steps suggested by Crawford et al. (1992) for memory journaling. Data generation and analysis processes are synthesised in the three phases of memory work outlined by the aforementioned authors. The first phase entails reflections and construction, focusing on recording detailed experiences and capturing the participants' lived experiences. Phase 2 involves examination, where ideas emanate from the memory, searching for similarities, differences, clichés, contradictions, and cultural imperatives. Phase 3 involves theorisation, where academic analysis occurs in relation to relevant theoretical insights. In this step, the write-up of the theorisation is also completed. Being an action researcher, I could see the link between these phases and the action research steps to plan, act, observe, and reflect. Zuber-Skerritt and Wood (2019) outlined that the planning phase identifies a problem and prepares a strategy to solve the problem. The acting stage, according to Putman and Rock (2016), is an implementation of the plan. Thereafter the authors described the observing step as a process of turning the spotlight onto the effectiveness of the action within the context of the phenomenon. The reflecting step then gathers information to engage in the data analysis, which includes critical reflection and theorisation. In addition, Mertler (2012) claimed that the reflection process shapes future action research cycles. Below, I integrate the work of Crawford et al. (1992) and Putman and Rock (2016) to explain the steps I followed with my memory drawing.

Phase 1

Planning: I deliberated on my prompt: "What can I learn from memory drawing to improve my pedagogical practices in keeping with the PALAR paradigm?" I then considered my experiences as a learner at school

and planned my drawing.

Acting: I then drew details of my experiences as a learner at school (see Figure 1) without engaging in interpretation or justification. I made sure to include “inconsequential” or “trivial” items that were part of my memory of the classroom, for example, the clock, which seemed important to the teacher, and the books she kept glancing at. These were my earliest memories of school that I could recall.

Phase 2

Observing: I examined my drawing of the classroom scene and observed and listed social understandings and meanings embedded in the drawing. These are noted on the side of my drawing.

Phase 3

Reflecting: I reflected on the items on my list and analysed them. I noted contradictions with my memory drawings in relation to PALAR and critical pedagogy. I then proceeded with the write-up of my interpretations. This act of reflection enabled me to engage with my memories, have conversations with them, and respond to them, as suggested by Crawford et al. (1992).

Ethical Principles

Ethical principles are crucial in all research, and it was my obligation and responsibility to ensure that in my research, I would not cause any harm. I adhered to the ethical considerations set out by the university. In self-study research, it is important to continually reflect on ethical practices through all aspects of the study by being honest and not harming anyone, as suggested by Kortjass (2019). Ethics also enhances the quality of research and contributes to its trustworthiness and, in self-study research, transparency, honesty, and reflective engagement are essential. Although I did not engage with my critical friends in this study, I have presented my clarifications and descriptions of the data sources I used. I explain how I generated, represented, and interpreted the data as suggested by Kortjass (2019).

Findings and Discussion

Engaging in Memory Drawings for Pedagogical Transformation

The drawing in Figure 1 represents my early experiences of schooling, which influenced my pedagogical approaches through my years as a teacher and then a teacher educator. By engaging in memory drawing, similar to Kortjass (2019), I attempted to understand and transform my pedagogical practice. In my drawing, the educator is the authority figure and the source of knowledge in the classroom. The learners in my picture sit passively and listen attentively, following the educator's instructions. The classroom is arranged in neat rows in order, with learners facing the educator. The learners in my drawing represent a homogenous group, implying that the teacher uses a single approach without acknowledging the nuances of diversity present and the need for diverse teaching approaches and materials. The books on the table portray the prescriptive curriculum that the educator follows, and which must be completed within a

specific timeframe (represented by the clock). Opportunities to connect socially are limited in the classroom because learners are expected to listen and complete the tasks set out for them.

Figure 1

My Memory Drawing



I argue that applying the central principles of PALAR challenges the traditional teaching mentioned above. Central to PALAR is recognising all voices in the action learning group by engaging in dialogue (Zuber-Skerrit, 2018). Instead of passively receiving knowledge like the learners in my memory drawing, PALAR, situated in the action research genre, requires all participants to be actively engaged (Wood, 2020). The learners in the memory drawing are seated in neat and orderly rows, while PALAR is cyclic, non-linear and often "messy" (Zuber-Skerrit, 2015). The learning group is assumed to be homogenous and are treated as if they are equal, whereas PALAR's central assumption is that diversity still exists in groups that appear homogenous (Sanchez, 2019). Furthermore, PALAR not only accommodates but also celebrates and values diversity as an asset because all voices are heard (Luthuli, 2019). The memory drawing implies that the educator is guided by a fixed curriculum, which is placed on her table, whereas in PALAR, outcomes cannot be predicted because each cycle of inquiry is iterative, shaped by the reflections of the group, and dependent on their needs (Setlhare-Kajee, 2018). PALAR requires building human relationships, which takes time and thus cannot be constrained by time limits. My memory drawing also focuses on developing the cognitive domain, while PALAR promotes the development of all aspects of being human—head, heart, and hands—(Wood, 2020). Learners sitting in rows facing the educator are traditional and outmoded whereas relationships are the key to the success of a PALAR project, and social connection is a requirement (Neethling, 2015). The Table 1 summarises my reflection on PALAR as a tool for my pedagogical transformation from traditional teaching modes.

Table 1

A Summary of My Learnings From My Memory Drawing

Traditional Teaching Approach Versus PALAR	
Traditional Teaching (My Memory Drawing)	**PALAR for Pedagogical Transformation**
The educator is an authority figure positioned as the source of knowledge or as the knower.	PALAR facilitators recognise all voices, and participants engage in dialogue.
The students sit passively, listen attentively, and follow the educator's instructions.	PALAR is action research where all participants are actively engaged.
The classroom is orderly and arranged in neat rows.	PALAR is cyclic, non-linear, and often "disorderly" or "messy."
All learners are assumed to be a homogenous group.	Diversity is not only accommodated but celebrated.
The educator follows a predictable curriculum.	PALAR cannot be predicted because each cycle of inquiry is iterative and shaped by the reflections of the group.
Time constraints are in place.	PALAR requires time because people need to build relationships with each other.
Cognition and the learning of content are highlighted.	PALAR promotes a more holistic approach focusing on all aspects of being human (head, heart, and hands).
Opportunities to connect socially are limited in the classroom because students are expected to listen and complete the tasks set out for them.	Relationships are the key to the success of a PALAR project and social connection is a requirement.

Engaging in PALAR as a researcher was undoubtedly a catalyst for me to revisit my pedagogical approaches. I could see the benefit of applying PALAR as a research methodology to bring about positive and sustainable change in my research group. I felt a moral responsibility to apply the same principles to improve my pedagogical approach to result in more sustainable learning for my students. Being authentic means consistency between your personal beliefs and professional conduct (Lehman et al., 2019). Hence, as a PALAR researcher, I wanted my students to benefit by attaining long-term skills to cope with the ever-changing educational landscape as life-long learners (Korsakova, 2020). I, therefore, argue that sustainable learning can be achieved when the above PALAR principles are applied to pedagogical practice.

Based on the above reflections on my memory drawing, I further expand on vital PALAR principles that contribute to sustainable learning. Firstly, PALAR emphasises that dialogue is a tool for mutual knowledge exchange. For sustainable learning, students need to develop dialogical interaction skills, enabling them to listen to various perspectives to cope with growing diversity in the education landscape. Aligned with Freire (2005), dialogue also encourages collective knowledge acquisition, which highlights the social and interactive nature of sustainable learning. Hence, as they interact and learn, they develop the ability to collaborate, communicate, compromise, coach, and commit (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018), thus developing the

required skills for sustainable knowledge acquisition. Secondly, PALAR emphasises epistemic justice, where knowledge production and dissemination are equitable (McAteer & Wood, 2018). Once more, this would enable student teachers to respect marginalised viewpoints and include Indigenous knowledge systems in their teaching. Thirdly, the fostering of meaningful relationships highlights the role of authentic relationships in sustainable learning where students' humanity and dignity are recognised (Freire, 2005) and they feel valued, heard, and supported in their learning journeys. Fourthly, PALAR advocates for experiential learning, a well-rounded learning experience that enables individuals not only to understand information cognitively but also to engage with it emotionally and apply it practically in meaningful ways (Wood, 2020). Learners sitting passively on chairs, just listening without engaging with the material, is problematic because experiential learning is overlooked. This lack of active engagement in passive listening without application limits their ability to connect theoretical knowledge with practical experience and can hinder their ability to apply their knowledge in real-life situations (Graham et al., 2015). Active engagement is thus an essential cornerstone of sustainable learning because the gap between theory and practice is narrowed, and people can drive meaningful change by applying knowledge in authentic contexts. According to Kolb's theory of experiential learning, action enhances understanding and promotes critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and personal growth, which are all aligned with the concept of sustainable learning (Castle & Buckler, 2021). Therefore, promoting PALAR principles of dialogue, ensuring epistemic justice, cultivating relationships, facilitating experiential learning, and encouraging active engagement, could deepen student teachers' learning, enabling them to sustain their learning as future change agents in their classrooms and communities.

Re-Examining My Worldview for Pedagogical Transformation

In addition to using memory drawings to develop an awareness of how my past shaped my present practice, at a deeper level, I needed to turn the mirror inward and reflect on my current worldview that shaped my pedagogical decisions (Mortari, 2015). An example of triple-loop learning, this meta-reflection (reflecting about reflection), raised my awareness of the dissonance between my beliefs and my actual practice (Hummelbrunner, 2015). This included examining my ontological beliefs regarding truth and reality and my epistemological beliefs concerning what constitutes valid knowledge and how valid knowledge is constructed (Al-Ababneh, 2020). This process required me to begin the uncomfortable process of revisiting my existing belief systems, which Kiguwa (2018) referred to as a forced introspection. Using PALAR, the ontological assumptions point to a socially constructed reality where truth is established through reflection and action (Freire, 2005). PALAR asserts that truth and reality are dynamic and need to be understood through people's experiences in relation to each other (Wood, 2020). Therefore, multiple realities exist—which meant revisiting my notions of an objective view of truth and reality as absolute, existing universally outside of human experience (Al-Ababneh, 2020). My perspective shifted towards acknowledging multiple possibilities of truth and reality shaped by people and their experiences.

Epistemologically aligned with PALAR, knowledge is regarded as valid if it is relevant to the lived experiences of the people involved or leads to mobilisation or transformation of their lives (Wood, 2020). Translated to my practice as a teacher educator, the content of my module needed to resonate with the everyday realities of my students. This means the insights I gained should be meaningful and applicable to my student teachers and their lives. According to PALAR, knowledge must be constructed through a process of collective meaning making between the people who are a part of the research group (Ofte, 2024). Hence, in my teaching, although my topics were predetermined, I needed to think of creative ways of adapting the curriculum by creating opportunities for students to engage actively in discussions, debates, and projects that allowed them to contribute their perspectives and experiences during my lessons. In this way, they exercise their agency in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information from me. I also began to encourage group work to enable my students to collaborate and share their diverse viewpoints by engaging in dialogue where they learnt to value and accept different perspectives. During discussions, I encourage my students to critique and reflect on the content, which leads them to question their own assumptions and challenge their established viewpoints. This fosters a deeper understanding of the subject and help students develop critical thinking skills for analysing complex issues. Accepting knowledge building as a co-construction also meant a change of my positionality from the knower to a facilitator of knowledge construction. As a teacher educator, I became conscious of the concept of epistemic democracy where knowledge is created by my students as active participants in the learning process. Hence the dialogue, collaboration, and inclusion of diverse perspectives that are central to PALAR (Damons, 2017) created an environment where my students began to see themselves as agents in their own learning. By encouraging dialogue, collaboration, and diverse perspectives (McAteer & Wood, 2018), I create an environment wherein my students contribute their insights and experiences to collectively construct knowledge thus leading to more sustainable learning.

In some of my students' reflections after a lecture, I noted the following narrative about group tasks (all names are pseudonyms):

> The lecturer gave us group tasks where we had to discuss a scenario or concept. We shared ideas through discussions in our small group, which we then shared with the whole class. Not everyone wants to engage in dialogue with a big group—so the small group helps the shy ones. When people work together, they share ideas, help each other, and depend on each other's strengths to achieve a common goal. (Siwe)

Siwe's narrative evidences the dialogue principle discussed above. The small group format created a safe space for even shy students to engage, resonating with PALAR principles of dialogue, collaboration, communication, compromise, coaching, and epistemic justice by creating opportunities for diverse voices to contribute. Vuyo (below) also noted the value of play-based learning in the lectures and how this

enhanced active and experiential learning:

> In today's lecture, we were introduced to Kahoot, where we participated in an educational quiz. These methods are fun and are not used much for lectures, but the focus is on play, and it does capture our attention—that's a big one.

Rather than passive listening, the above gamified approach captured attention, making the educational experience more engaging and memorable. This created emotional and practical connections with the module content. Thandi commented on the value of peer teaching and presentations during the lectures:

> If you want to learn something, then teach it. So our preparation for our presentations helped us understand the content much better. When we engaged in peer teaching in this module, we had a chance to express ourselves and explain concepts as we saw it. This made learning easier as we could easily identify with the examples used by our peers.

Thandi's comment demonstrates epistemic justice where peer teaching voiced the diverse perspectives of the student while simultaneously fostering active engagement because students could deepen their understanding of the content through the teaching process. The dialogical nature of these peer interactions created a space where knowledge was co-constructed rather than merely transmitted, allowing students to both express their unique interpretations and learn from others' viewpoints.

Hence, through collaborative learning experiences—including small group discussions, play-based learning, and peer teaching—my educational approach ensured my students were active co-constructors of knowledge, embodying the participatory and democratic principles of PALAR.

Self-Study and PALAR: Research for Pedagogical Transformation

I was first introduced to self-study as a research design when a colleague resigned from my institution, and I was offered the opportunity to supervise two of her postgraduate students who were using self-study. My two-year journey supervising their self-study projects and working with PALAR in my own scholarship opened new avenues of growth and personal transformation for me. Pithouse-Morgan (2022) explained that self-study increases educators' self-awareness in evaluating their practice and what is most important to them, professionally. Working in a PALAR paradigm but supervising self-study thus forced me to examine my practice to determine any contradiction between my participatory research paradigm and my traditional teaching approach as a teacher educator. Self-study and PALAR appear to be different in terms of aims, with PALAR aiming for collaborative learning and research for sustainable change in communities by engaging in iterative cycles of action and reflection (Zuber-Skerrit, 2018), and self-study aiming for individual learning and research at a personal level aiming for professional development (Pithouse-Morgan, 2022). However, I argue that both research designs share commonalities in their focus on sustainable lifelong learning and positive social change. Both require action and reflection practices, critical

examination, and solutions to real-life problems. Both approaches contribute valuable insights to educational research, albeit with differing emphases on individual versus collective inquiry and action.

Concluding Remarks

This article reports on my reflections on the transformation of my pedagogical practice following the use of PALAR in my scholarship. PALAR aligns with more participatory approaches than traditional lecture methods of instruction. Strengthened by student reflections, the study reveals that PALAR promotes participatory and experiential learning that leads to more sustainable lifelong learning. Just as PALAR researchers need to work authentically to bring about positive change by recognising the knowledge of all people, building relationships of trust with people, and engaging in individual and collective reflection for change, so these principles can be applied to my classroom as an initial teacher educator to bring about sustainable learning. PALAR, as a research design, not only transforms communities but also, according to my reflections in this study, leads to the individual transformation of the facilitator first. In fact, it is difficult to successfully facilitate a PALAR project without self-reflection and personal transformation.

Similarly geared at positive transformation, this self-study used a memory drawing as a tool to understand and transform my pedagogical practice. Memory drawings brought to light contradictions in my pedagogical practice and the need to be cautious about unconsciously repeating my past experiences as a learner in a traditional classroom. My traditional schooling shaped my ontological views of truth and reality as absolute, static, and universal, as well as epistemological beliefs about knowledge as objective and acquired through scientific methods, which required revisiting. In keeping with PALAR's focus on engaging the entire human (head, heart, and hands), the memory drawing created an opportunity for me to act and reflect on my learnings. It is a given that educators need to engage in self-study to transform and improve their practice for sustainable learning. I, however, recommend that PALAR researchers also utilise self-study methods to examine and challenge their current paradigms of reality, truth, and knowledge acquisition.

This article argues that incorporating PALAR principles into teaching promotes sustainable learning by fostering dialogue, ensuring epistemic justice, cultivating relationships, facilitating experiential learning, and encouraging active engagement. These elements deepen students' learning, enabling them to become effective change agents in their future educational environments. Self-study methodology enhances PALAR by developing critical awareness and self-reflection, catalysing individual transformation. However, PALAR implementation faces significant challenges within structured educational contexts, including rigid curricula, standardised assessment requirements, time constraints, and entrenched institutional traditions favouring teacher-centred approaches. Nevertheless, by embracing research methodologies that prioritise positive change and sustainable learning in initial teacher education, student teachers could develop as lifelong learners capable of making meaningful impacts in their classrooms and communities.

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