

Gaby Jacobs  
Famke van Lieshout  
Miranda Snoeren

## Symposium

**Democratic partnerships in action  
research: dilemmas and strategies**

## In the next 90 minutes:



**THINK  
BIGGER**

- Introduction
- Three presentations on dilemmas in trying to establish democratic partnerships
- Short dialogue in couples on the key dilemmas
- Dialogue on strategies to resolve key dilemmas

# Democracy in Action Research

- ‘The aim of action research is to support democratization processes’ (Greenwood & Levin, 2007: 265). Participation is central.
- ‘The essence of the democratic process is the cogeneration of knowledge’ (Greenwood & Levin, 2007: 265)
- The formation of a ‘communicative space’ (Kemmis, 2001)
- Dialogue in which processes of conjoint meaning making take place: *‘The strength of democracy lies in the process of relationship’* (Gergen, 2003: 46)

# Three projects and three levels of analysis

**THINK  
BIGGER**

- Inter-organisational: university-professional practice partnerships (Gaby)
- Intra-organisational: professionals and management (Famke)
- Interpersonal: professionals and clients (Miranda)

# **Dilemmas in collaborative action research for professional development and knowledge co-construction.**

**A story about university-practice  
partnerships in a Community of  
Practice.**

**Gaby Jacobs**

# PROSENSE project

- 4-year project (2012-2016), funded by RAAK-SIA
- Goal is twofold:
  1. **Professional development** of teachers in primary education aimed at strengthening the social and communicative development of children
  2. **Knowledge co-construction** on three issues: pedagogical sensitivity; child development; and collective learning



**THINK  
BIGGER**

1. FSW: formal network of 42 schools in primary education (Utrecht area)
2. The Royal Auris Group for children with speech, hearing and language problems → schools for special education
3. Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Eindhoven/Tilburg
4. Utrecht Professional University
5. University for Humanistic Studies, Utrecht

# Collaborative action research design

Teachers take on small action research projects in their own schools (together with peers, pupils and parents, and with the support of university researchers)

They develop a project idea based on three questions:

- What kind of child development do I aim for? (pedagogical goal)
- What kind of pedagogical sensitivity does this require from myself and my colleagues as teachers? (professional development goal)
- How do I involve colleagues, my team and school in the project?

Their research enhances practical knowing and professional development

They share ideas, questions, findings in a Community of Practice (CoP). By collating the individual results they contribute to the co-construction of knowledge on the three research topics of the overall project => knowing-about-action or theoretical knowledge:

Child development – pedagogical sensitivity – collective learning

- Cogenerative model (Greenwood & Levin, 2007): ‘encounter between the worlds of practical reasoning and scientifically constructed knowledge’ (p. 104)
- Democratic ideal of the project: participation in research and knowledge co-construction
- ‘Knowledge democracy’ as key issue: whose knowledge counts?

# Three dilemmas



**THINK  
BIGGER**

Three dilemmas in creating CoPs for professional development and knowledge co-construction:

1. Commonality and diversity in research
2. Self-regulation versus direction and framing
3. Togetherness and alienation

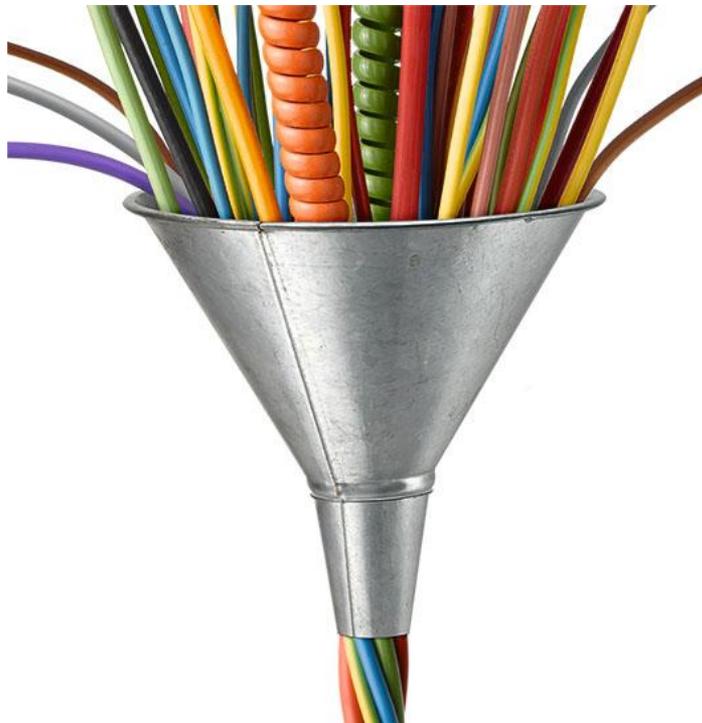
# 1. Commonality and diversity in knowledge co-construction

THINK  
BIGGER

- Teacher research as professional development requires teachers to work with their own research questions.
- However, (too much) diversity between the projects within a CoP leads to fragmentation and hinders the goal of knowledge co-construction
  - Teachers bring their own project ideas, ranging from Animal Assisted Interventions in special education to Positive Behavior Support and the development of a dialogue tool
  - University researchers are struggling to connect these to the goals of the project in such a way, that more generic knowledge can be drawn from these
- How to balance commonality and diversity in knowledge co-construction?

# Projects through the funnel or loose ends?

THINK BIGGER



## 2. Self-regulation versus direction and framing

THINK  
BIGGER

- Practice (with professional and school development goals) requires flexibility in the research design whereas research output requires more direction and framing of the project
  - The school network director: autonomy for the participating schools
  - Auris directors: direction in order to connect the theme of child development with the strategic policy of Auris
  - The universities: offering a framework in order to build evidence from collating case studies. Some university lecturers put a strong value on the autonomy of teachers as researchers; others on research output
- Who is leading (on what): **research** (university) **or practice?**

# Practice goals or research goals?



Practice

Research



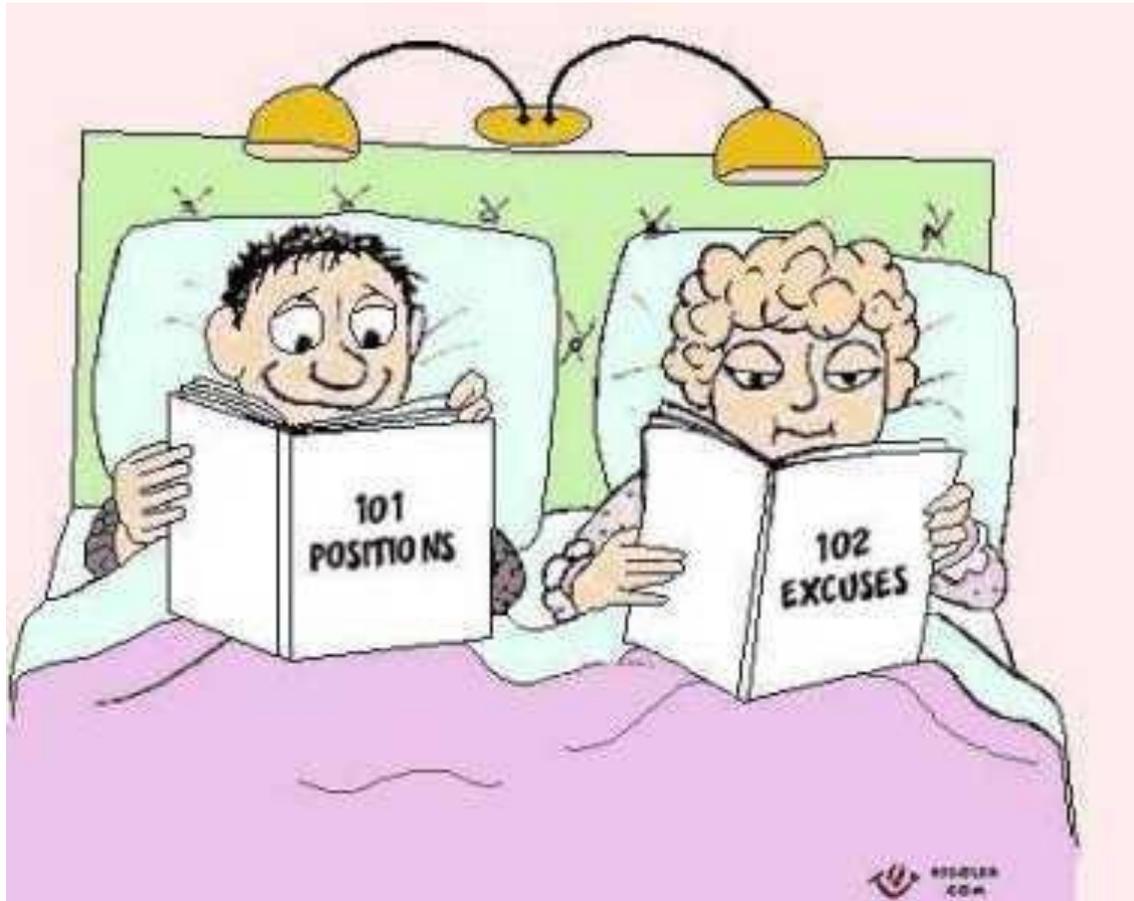
## 3. Togetherness and alienation

THINK  
BIGGER

- The idea of CoPs stresses the importance of shared values and visions, reciprocal trust, connection and belonging as conditions for professional learning and development and knowledge co-construction (Stoll et al, 2006; Handley et al, 2006; Lave, ...).
- However, these are not a given; they stand in a dynamic interaction with alienation and disconnection.
  - Teachers and professional institutions estranged by the language of research/universities
  - Teachers feeling not supported by their school/director
  - Power differences and diversity of interests, goals, cultures and discourses in-between universities
  - and between universities and professional institutions
- How to sustain critical dialogue about different desires and goals?

**It's like a marriage.... our responsibility to ongoing processes of relating.**

**THINK BIGGER**



**THINK  
BIGGER**



**Fontys**

**University of  
Applied Sciences**