



Reflections on the project EduSenNet

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A. Theoretical Framework

The following two theories are chosen as they hopefully will help us to understand:

- What sort of survey is carried out in the EduSenNet – project; why and for whom (*Action research*)
- What sort of frames/obstacles or possibilities there are for seniors to take part in learning activities (*Frame factor theory*)

Action Research

Very often what is called action research are studies carried out in the course of an activity or occupation, typically in the field of education to improve the methods and approach of those involved.

In Wikipedia it is described in those words:

*“**Action research** is either research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve problems”* (<https://en.wikipedia.>)

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of those practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

Participatory action research (PAR) has emerged in recent years as a significant methodology for intervention, development and change within communities and groups. It is now promoted and implemented by many international development agencies and university programs, as well as many local community organizations around the world. PAR builds on the critical

pedagogy put forward by Paulo Freire as a response to the traditional formal models of education where the “teacher” stands at the front and “imparts” information to the “students” who are passive recipients. This was further developed in adult education models throughout Latin America.

Practitioners who engage themselves in action research inevitably find it to be an empowering experience. It has been useful in many countries as a part of development work e.g. in Namibia (Odin -95)

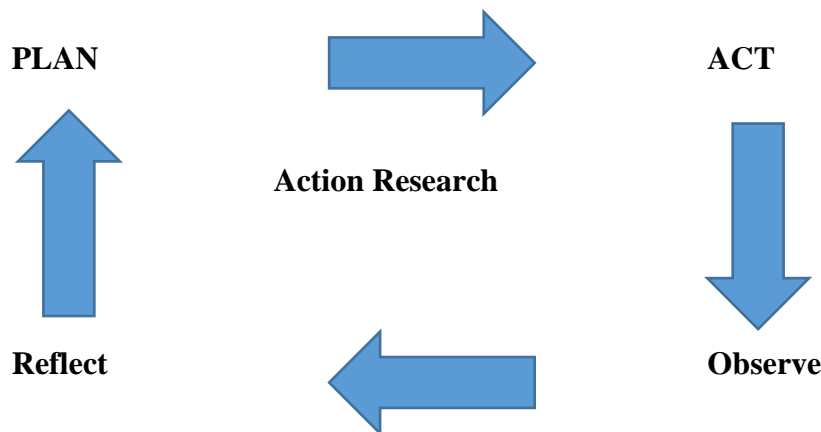


Diagram 1 Action Research

Frame Factor Theory

In designing modern education different strategies have been used and researched on. Urban Dahllöv was one of the researchers who quite early stressed the importance of not only looking at the teaching/learning process itself but also to look at the frames in terms of time allocated, organisation of learning situations and other frame factors to understand and explain the outcomes.

Later followers to Dahllöv have stressed the importance for educational researchers to bridge the gap between micro- and macro studies and to do it with due regard both to the frame conditions surrounding the actors and to the complexities of the processes involved.

The theories about the phenomena outlined above do vary with the problem and its context, but they have in each case been inspired by the same basic model “the frame factor theory”.

Gunnar Berg has from the frame factor theory developed what he refers to as a “Free space model” where he is stressing that there are certain frames like laws, rules and regulations, resources and time available etc. These frames constitutes the “outer boundaries” for what is possible. But through empirical studies he could also identify an “inner boundary” which has more to do with how people think about their free space of possibilities to act in different ways.

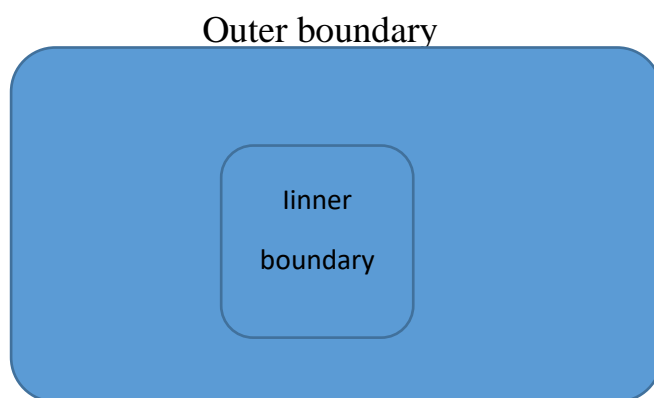


Diagram 2. The free space model

U3As are not strictly regulated by laws and state grants/resources but we can still use the frame factor thinking and the “free space model” to understand why people answer the way they do to the questionnaire in our survey.

How do they look upon their frames and possibilities for taking part in education activities – where are their “inner boundaries” and what constitutes these boundaries. With the help of those theories and models we might come closer in our understanding of the answers to the questionnaire.

B. Discussion of general results from survey

1. Retirement – a New Situation

Retirement should be looked upon in its new context, not as something necessary for all when work/labour was so hard that very few people were able to continue after a certain age. Work has changed and so should “not work”. Most of us enjoy to do something, to mean something and to find a meaning in life. Now many seniors do go into a crisis because of loss of identity at retirement, as retirement more means a mental loss than freedom. If life becomes too still the brain seems to have the capacity to develop fears which are not real and not easy to handle. – *“If a bicycle stops it will fall”*.

This is also illustrated by the answers of the questionnaire when people say that they themselves have to overcome some psychological obstacles to engage themselves in new learning activities after retirement.

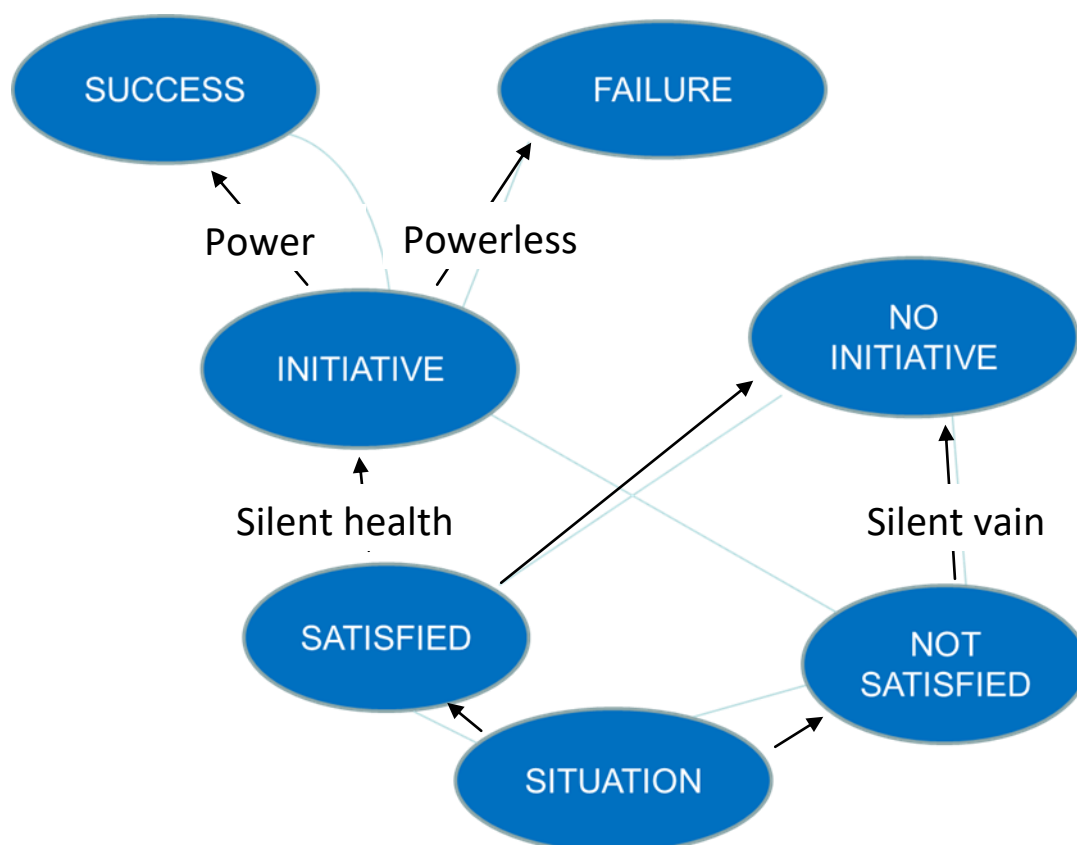


Diagram 4. Power and control of a situation - different alternatives for action

2. A Sense of Coherence

Many answers point out why people think that learning activities are important in later life. This is in line with the ideas of [Aaron Antonovsky](#), a professor of medical sociology. The term *salutogenesis* - coined by Antonovsky - describes an approach focusing on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease. More specifically, the "salutogenic model" is concerned with the relationship between health, stress, and coping. Antonovsky's theories reject the "traditional medical-model dichotomy separating health and illness". He described the relationship as a continuous variable, what he called the "*health-ease* versus *dis-ease* continuum".

The word "salutogenesis" comes from the Latin *salus* = health and the Greek *genesis* = origin. Antonovsky developed the term from his studies of "how people manage stress and stay well". He observed that stress is ubiquitous, but not all individuals have negative health outcomes in response to stress. Instead, some people achieve health despite their exposure to potentially disabling stress factors.

Sense of coherence. The "sense of coherence" is a theoretical formulation that provides a central explanation for the role of stress in human functioning. "Beyond the specific stress factors that one might encounter in life, and beyond your perception and response to those events, what determines whether stress will cause you harm is whether or not the stress violates your sense of coherence " Antonovsky defined Sense of Coherence as:

"a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement."

In his formulation, the sense of coherence has three components:

- *Comprehensibility*: the extent to which events are perceived as making logical sense, that they are ordered, consistent and structured.
- *Manageability*: the extent to which we are able to cope with situations.
- *Meaningfulness*: the extent to which we feel that life has a meaning and that it is worth taking part in and to meet challenges.

According to Antonovsky, the third element is the most important. If a person believes there is no reason to persist and survive and confront challenges, if they have no sense of meaning, then they will have no motivation to comprehend and manage events. His essential argument is that "salutogenesis" depends on experiencing a strong "sense of coherence." His research demonstrated that the sense of coherence predicts positive health outcomes.

What we can see from the answers is that learning activities in a social context strengthen the sense of coherence and thus health.

3. Senior Knowledge

The classical pedagogy has mainly dealt with education and teaching and less with learning. A more developed pedagogy for seniors has to concentrate more on the seniors as learners and less on the teachers. Learning does not necessary mean that we want to be activated by others. We need more of other people to discuss with and mentors who can help to sort out thinking structures and are interested in a step by step growing holistic view. We have got the experience and time to think and reflect, but we are not passive but reflective actors following Schöns terminology: “*reflective practitioner*”.

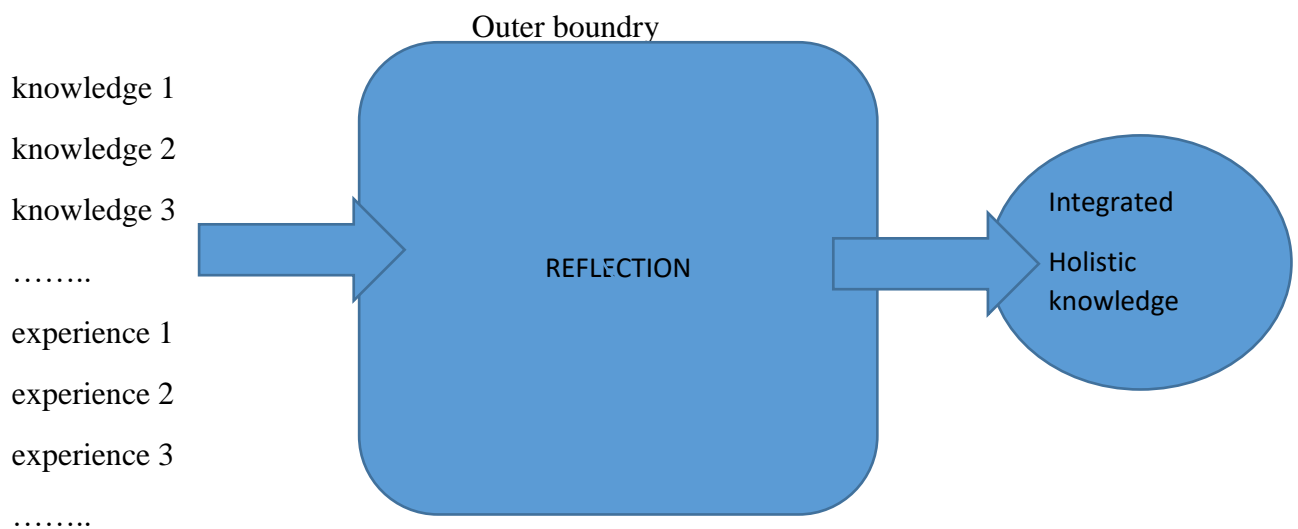


Diagram 5. Senior knowledge as a result of reflection

We need a new way of research on ageing, where also seniors are actively engaged. What is presented in this report is a humble step in this direction. We can contribute even if we have not got the economic resources and works at a slower speed. At the same time it will give us a chance to be seen and listened to to get the evidence that we *exist* and still learn even if we perhaps learn in another way than young people. We do not learn facts as easy and do not remember all of them the same way as we used to do – but at the same time we have the capacity of integrating new knowledge with old knowledge and experience which helps us to understand complex situations and perhaps come up with other alternative ideas than young people do. We still have no way to measure in a scientific way if it is like this but we hope for someone who will do research on it and develop instruments for it.

4. Role of Seniors in Society

Work has traditionally (Taylorism) been measured as time. What would happen if work was measured in terms of results? Perhaps this would suit better as seniors who could then concentrate on good results and not on the time which young people do. From a survey in Uppsala (USU) it is reported that out of 188 seniors 28% had wanted to continue with the job they had - either fully or partly - but were forced to retire. (USU report no. 14. 2012)

A discussion have now started about the future labour market and different models for it, where perhaps even seniors could fit in. We need to ask new questions which are not based on old thinking and traditional division between labour and what is now “not labour”/ retirement.

How do differences in living conditions and the distribution of individual resources determine the ability of citizens to participate in decision-making processes? What is the distribution of power, resources and influence among seniors – and seniors compared to other groups? We need solid data on this to be able to work for a more fair and equal situation!

Retirement age regulations may be practical from an administrative point of view but “elderly” as a concept is a social construction. We carry with us our capabilities and experiences throughout life, and even though our power and energy may decline with age, society cannot afford not to make use of all the knowledge and experience held by the entire population - including not excluding seniors.

We cannot as seniors just be looked upon as taxpayers and voters at elections. For a continuous development of democracy in the society we all need lifelong learning as a basic foundation for taking active part. The great political challenge in a country where many reach a high age must be to find ways of strengthening elderly people’s capacity to cope with new situations, to find consistency and meaning in life, and thus also ensure that they remain in good health. We would thus stress the importance of lifelong learning as a means for seniors to gain power for taking active part in democratic and political processes in the society.