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# The efficacy of holistic learning strategies in the development of church leaders in Mozambique: an action research approach

by

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of the requirements for the degree of

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Supervisor: Dr. P. H. du Toit

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# DECLARATION

I declare that "The efficacy of holistic learning strategies in the development of church leaders in Mozambique: an action research approach" is my own work and that all sources were acknowledged.

……..… …….

signature date

Student Number 23315556

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**by**

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**Degree: Philosophiae Doctor**
**Department: Curriculum Studies**
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## SUMMARY

This Participatory Action Research (PAR) project focused on "holistic learning" which includes "social" and "spiritual" learning and "whole-brained" learning. Broadly interpreting and applying the four-quadrant brain model of Herrmann (1994), and other models of the brain, my study seeks to understand *whether*, *to what extent* and *how* learning can be advanced by deliberately employing holistic learning strategies to narrow the gap between theory and practice, between left-brain and right-brain learning, and between cognition and emotion. I introduced *tri-dimensional (3-D) practice* as the combination of using *holistic learning strategies* in *cooperative learning groups* within *spiritual learning environments.*

The site of this PAR study was the network of cooperative learning groups in Mozambique within the educational system of the Church of the Nazarene. Facilitators were trained to use six specific "holistic learning strategies": *group discussions* of various types, *praxis* (as reflection-dialogue-action), *teamwork*, *rehearsing integrity*, *singing-for-learning* and *classical spiritual disciplines* within *cooperative learning groups*, also a holistic learning strategy. These aspects are typical of the widely used model of Theological Education by Extension (TEE), refined in this study. According to data gathered in a large hybrid survey, 97% of the 595 respondents to this question responded favourably in terms of the skills of these facilitators even though the average number of years of their formal schooling, 7.7, would normally be considered "minimal".

The study generates findings to support the position that holistic learning strategies enhance the quality of adult learning, at least in settings like those in Mozambique in which the facilitation of learning was 1) bilingual (Portuguese and maternal language), 2) focused on learners who are leaders-in-training, 3) deliberate in spiritual content and ambient, and 4) conducted by minimally-schooled facilitators in cooperative learning groups. The findings, from the responses recorded in qualitative phases of the research, corroborated by descriptive statistics, indicate that the efficacy of holistic learning strategies is related to certain modes of mental activity like whole-making, categorising, and others.

This PAR project was conducted within an original research framework, Arboric Research, which takes into account the dynamic, fluid and organic nature of human systems, recognising that infrastructures in which the research takes place are different at the end of the study than at the beginning, like observing the "sap" within a growing grapevine or a tree.

**Key terms:** Participatory Action Research, whole-brain learning, brain-based learning, spiritual learning, adult learning, hemispheric asymmetry reduction, Theological Education by Extension (TEE), Mozambique, facilitation of learning, Arboric Research Design.

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## Acknowledgments

Sculpture expresses. Sculpture in southern Africa frequently expresses a theme which was new to me when my husband and I moved from Romania to Mozambique in 2000. The sculptures, usually of ebony, stand vertically as intricately carved tubes of people piled up one on top of another. At the outdoor artisans fair, I asked a craftsman to tell me who the people are. He explained that "we" are the people at the top, the present generation; the other figures below "us" represent those, living now and in previous generations, who helped us to live and to stand. Connectedness to those living and to those whose lives before ours contributed to who we are – this theme in sculpture introduced me to the friendly worldview which affects me everyday as I live and work among Mozambicans and as I present this report to you of research conducted in their setting.

I have been told that "PhD programmes produce people not papers". Therefore, in a truly African way, I gratefully acknowledge the large, intricate "pile of people" who are part of me completing this work:

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