

Table of Contents

Editorial

<i>Olav Eikeland, Søren Frimann, Lone Hersted, and Julie Borup Jensen</i> Special Issue: Conceptualising Action Research: Basic assumptions and terminology in Action Research.....	95
<i>Finn Thorbjørn Hansen</i> What would apophatic Action Research look like? Learning to consider delicate matters of silence and wonder in professional practices.....	100
<i>Christine Edwards-Groves and Karin Rönnerman</i> Action Research conceptualised in seven cornerstones as conditions for transforming education	116
<i>Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås</i> Praxeological dialogues from within, handling tensions in dialogical praxis-oriented Action Research.....	134
<i>Mark K. Watson</i> How to go on? An ethnographic return to the ‘rough ground’ in PAR.....	150
<i>Olav Eikeland, Søren Frimann, Lone Hersted and Julie Borup Jensen</i> Are action researchers mixed up? Reviewing and revising basic assumptions, concepts, and terminology in and by means of action research.....	165

Discussion

<i>Ken Dovey</i> Discussion Paper: Response to <i>Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research</i>	183
---	-----

Interview

<i>Interview with Danilo Streck</i> About my learning journey with Action Research.....	193
--	-----

What would apophatic Action Research look like?

Learning to consider delicate matters of silence and wonder in professional practices

Finn Thorbjørn Hansen

Non-knowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult transcendence of knowledge. This is the price that must be paid to an oeuvre to be, at all times, a sort of pure beginning, which makes its creation an exercise in freedom.

Jean Lescure (1956, p. 78)

Abstract: Inspired by an ‘apophatic turn’ in theology, philosophy and art, and with insights from existential phenomenology, the article encourages us to step back as actors in order to let life or the phenomenon itself act upon us. This kind of apophatic thinking is not so far away from the thinking of the Norwegian philosopher Olav Eikeland when he describes “Insider and Praxis Action Research”. And yet, the apophatic potentials in his way of understanding action research are here elaborated by pointing to three dimensions: the Knowledge-, Being- and Mystery dimensions in a praxis, and to the four ways of seeing praxis from within both a “gnoseology” and an “agnoseology”. The latter being led by a deep sense of wonder followed by what Daoist’s call Wu Wei or “effortless actions”.

Keywords: Praxis Action Research, apophatic philosophy, existential phenomenology, contemplative wonder

¿Qué aspecto tendría la investigación acción alfabética?

Aprendiendo a tomar en consideración temas delicados sobre el silencio y la interrogación en las prácticas profesionales

Resumen: Inspirado por un “giro apofático” en la teología, filosofía y el arte, y con reflexiones desde la fenomenología existencial, el artículo nos anima a dar un paso atrás como actores para dejar que la vida o el fenómeno mismo actúe sobre nosotros y nosotras. Este tipo de pensamiento apofático no está tan alejado del pensamiento del filósofo noruego Olav Eikeland cuando describe “Investigación Acción interna y la Praxis”. Y aún así, los potenciales apofáticos de su manera de entender la investigación acción se elaboran aquí apuntando a tres dimensiones: la dimensión del Conocimiento, la del “Siendo” y la del Misterio en una praxis; y a las cuatro maneras de ver la praxis desde dentro tanto de una “gnoseología” como de una “agnoseología”. Siendo lo último guiado por un profundo sentido de asombro por lo que los Daoistas llaman Wu Wei o “acciones realizadas sin esfuerzo”.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción basada en la Praxis, filosofía apofática, fenomenología existencial, asombro contemplativo

Introduction

As Action Researchers, how do we approach realities, experiences, and life phenomena which are inaccessible to discursive thought, ineffable, and yet occasionally saturated with a strange and unfathomable meaningfulness? We might sense this in rather delicate moments of deep contemplative wonder (Schinkel, 2021) or when experiencing beautiful moments of care, silence, love, sorrow, trust, deep joy, or inspiring and epiphatic moments of art, spiritual exercises, or walks in nature. These are important meaning-giving experiences connected to what the German sociologist Harmut Rosa terms the “vertical axes of resonance” and “our need for existential resonance”(Rosa, 2019, 2020).

How do we, as Action Researchers, capture such delicate and volatile experiences of meaning-giving moments and “callings”, which appear to be woven into a practice or relationship, and which can only be understood from *within* this practice or situation by being deeply engaged with it or acting by virtue of it? If we are too eager to grasp these moments and phenomena through intentional actions, methods and clear concepts they seem strangely to disappear in front of our eyes. As if these enigmatic events will only be seen if we arrive with a non-knowing, receiving, listening and effortless action attitude.

During the last decade I have, as a philosopher and an Action Researcher, developed what I have called “Socratic and phenomenological-oriented Action Research”(Hansen, 2014, Hansen, 2015, 2016a, 2017, 2018; Dinkings & Hansen, 2016, Hansen & Jørgensen, 2020). Here so-called “Wonder Labs” are used to create contemplative moments of non-knowing and shift in the mindset from an intentional “doing-mode” to an effortless “being-mode” that let life call us to act.

Recently, I have found a need to re-conceptualise my own thinking in dialogue with the work of the Norwegian philosopher Olav Eikeland and his Aristotelian-inspired praxis research, which is now seen as an important version of Scandinavian action research. By comparing his thinking with a new paradigm in philosophy called “the apophatic turn in critical thinking”(Franke, 2020), I find a way to place my work on practicing wonder-based and phenomenological oriented Action Research. In my studies of Eikeland, I see “apophatic potentials”, which can be further developed through inspirations from existential phenomenology and hermeneutics (Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Gadamer) and Daoism.

In the following, I will first give a short description of what “apophatic thinking” is. Then I will turn to the work of Eikeland to spot the apophatic potentials. From there on I describe three dimensions inspired by existential phenomenology: the Knowledge-, Being- and Mystery-Dimensions. At the end I suggest four ways of seeing or getting in “resonance” with the ineffable events and experiences, which is not only relevant when doing action research in the artistic field but also when wanting to give space for existential resonance in professional practices such as hospitals, hospice or innovative sections in public organisations.

Apophatic thinking

By using the word “apophatic” I plug into a long and fascinating tradition in theology, philosophy, and art that works from a so-called “negative theology”, “negative ontology”, and

Action Research conceptualised in seven cornerstones as conditions for transforming education

Christine Edwards-Groves and Karin Rönnerman

Abstract: This article traces the philosophical and theoretical roots of Action Research to rescript its promise for site-based educational formation, reformation and transformation. The process of historicising Action Research through an extensive review of the extant literature, enabled us to establish seven cornerstones that captured the essence of the critical conditions: the practices and practice architectures, that give coherence and comprehensibility to Action Research as necessary for sustained and sustainable change in education. Framing these practices and practice architectures as cornerstones sets down important benefits for contemporary education requiring critical inquiry, rethought purposeful action and systematic responsive development. The cornerstones: contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community, were derived from viewing Action Research from its historical principle committed to democratic way of working. It is our position that the cornerstones account for, acknowledge and extend traditional perspectives and descriptions; and assist practitioners deepen understandings about the conditions necessary for opening up generative possibilities of Action Research in ways that do not neglect or lose sight of its core historical connections and democratic virtues.

Keywords: Action Research, community, democracy, inquiry, practice architectures, site ontological

Investigación-Acción conceptualizada en siete pilares como condiciones para transformar la educación

Resumen: Este artículo sigue las raíces filosóficas y tóricas de la Investigación Acción para reescribir su promesa de una formación, una reforma y una transformación educativas situadas. El proceso de construir la historicidad de la Investigación Acción a través de una revisión extensiva de la investigación existente nos permitió establecer siete claves que capturaron la esencia de las condiciones críticas: las prácticas y arquitecturas de la práctica, que dan coherencia y hacen comprensible la Investigación Acción son necesarias para el cambio continuo y sostenible en la educación. Enmarcar estas prácticas y arquitecturas de la práctica como claves trae importantes beneficios para la educación contemporánea que requiere investigación crítica, acción repensada y con sentido, y un desarrollo sistemático sensible. Las claves: contextualidad, compromiso, comunicación, colaboración, criticidad, colegialidad y comunidad, se derivaron desde la observación de la Investigación Acción desde su principio histórico comprometido con formas democráticas de trabajo. Nuestra posición es que las claves explican, reconocen y extienden perspectivas y descripciones clásicas; y ayudan a quienes realizan la práctica a profundizar su comprensión sobre las condiciones necesarias para abrir posibilidades generativas de Investigación Acción sin desatender o perder de vista sus conexiones históricas centrales y sus virtudes democráticas.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción, comunidad, democracia, investigación, arquitecturas del a práctica, ontología situada

Introduction

Action Research has a long of history in the field of educational sciences. Its basis has emerged from philosopher's ideas and views on democratic values in society (see notably, Dewey, 1916;1997). For newer generations, education forms an important pathway for guiding, negotiating and fostering these values: values open to critical inquiry, rethought purposeful action, and systematic responsive development. Throughout this history we have witnessed how Action Research has arisen as essential for fostering a critical inquiry stance in education. This is a stance necessary for provoking teachers and leaders to reflect critically and act responsively, with the view to forming, reforming and transforming their educational practices. In recent times, education has been described as being about helping "prepare people to live well in a world worth living in" (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p.14). This view highlights a double purpose of education as addressing the reciprocity between individual and collective goals with formational and transformational aspirations for both. These goals are captured in this definition of education by Kemmis, et al. (2014b, p.26) who stated:

Education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind.

Finding the critical connections between Action Research and education has been at the forefront of thinking by Carr and Kemmis (1986), who suggested that education is about critical praxis, requiring a person to demonstrably "make a wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in this situation" (p. 190). Here the practices of education, and so educational Action Research, must demonstrate an observable commitment to human well-being, the search for truth and the respect of all others (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). On this view, education is witnessed in the praxis and practices of people: this position has critical yet fundamental implications for understanding and practicing Action Research in contemporary times.

In recent years, in a climate where education is scrutinised intensely in terms of accountability, standards and performativity, educational Action Research has enjoyed a resurgence as an approach for transforming education practices. However, amidst this endeavour there has been a tendency in some jurisdictions to dismantle the foundations of Action Research by valorising hybridised practices where specific components or activities are packaged into bundles of segmented strategies, arrangements or methods¹ (Carr & Kemmis, 2005) or pushed as policy directives (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009) for implementing Action Research. Such tendencies exsanguinate the rich embodied heart of Action Research, reducing it to being considered as short-term time-bounded professional development

1 For instance, shorter term professional activities like dialogue circles, reading circles, inquiry learning, collegial learning and so on.

Praxeological dialogues from within, handling tensions in dialogical praxis-oriented Action Research

Catrine Torbjørnsen Halås

Abstract: This paper addresses the need to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production with and from within practices, and help handle tensions between research and practice in Dialogical Praxis-oriented Action Research. Building on Olav Eikeland's ideas of dialogues towards Praxis-based Theoria, supported by Hanna Arendt's perspectives on action, and based on experiences from a concrete project, the question explored, is whether Jakob Meløe's praxeological perspectives can give us concepts and terminology which can help us handle this challenge. After describing the ideas and methodology of the praxeology, the author discusses its potential impact; To support dialogical deliberative learning processes, acknowledging knowledge as an open-ended question of becoming, and praxis as a form of relational and ethical kind of knowing, empowering the subjects to create new beginnings, engaged in the never-ending process of change.

Keywords: Dialogical Action Research; Tensions; Praxis; Jakob Meløe; Praxeology.

Diálogos praxeológicos desde adentro: gestión de las tensiones en la investigación-acción dialógica orientada a la praxis

Resumen: Este artículo aborda la necesidad de desarrollar conceptos y terminología más y mejor ajustados a la producción de conocimiento con y desde dentro de las prácticas, y ayuda a gestionar tensiones entre la investigación y la práctica en la Investigación Acción orientada a la Praxis Dialógica. Construye sobre las ideas de Olav Eikeland en torno a diálogos orientados a la "Theoria" basada en la Praxis, apoyada por las perspectivas de Hanna Arendt sobre la acción, y sustentadas en experiencias de un proyecto concreto, la pregunta explorada es si las perspectivas praxeológicas de Jakob Meløe pueden darnos conceptos y terminología que puede ayudarnos a enfrentar este reto. Después de describir las ideas y la metodología de la praxeología, la autora discute su potencial impacto; Apoyar procesos de aprendizaje dialógicos deliberativos, reconocer el conocimiento como una pregunta abierta que esta continuamente convirtiéndose, y la praxis como una forma de conocimiento en la acción relacional y ética, empoderando a los sujetos para crear nuevos comienzos, comprometidos en el proceso de cambio sin final.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción Dialógica; Tensiones, Praxis, Jakob Meløe, Praxeología.

Addressing challenges ‘with’ and ‘within’

After 15 years as a social work practitioner, I started my journey to become a researcher. Now, after 15 years as an Action Researcher, where I have been navigating between practice and research, aiming to understand and develop practice from within, I am filled with experiences of various tensions. This paper addresses the need to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production from within practices, and help handle tensions between research and practice in Action Research. “Within” challenges the traditional roles between researchers and practitioners and brings tensions to the surface. As dealing with power and change, tensions are a natural part of Action Research. Several studies describe various tensions, for example tensions that arise in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics, evidence based and reflective practice, individual autonomy and community practices, and tensions between different actors, dual purposes and expectations (Phillips et al, 2018; De Finney & Ball, 2018; Aas, 2014).

But what tensions are emerging, depends on ontological, epistemological and methodological viewpoints in play. In this paper, I am concerned with offering concepts and a theoretical framework that is particularly suitable for supporting the process and goal of Dialogical Praxis-oriented Action Research (DPAR). Building on Olav Eikeland’s (2007) ideas of dialogues towards Praxis-based Theoria, supported with Hanna Arendt’s (1958) perspectives on action, the outcome of dialogue become clear; It is directed towards praxis as phronetic and ethical action, deliberating the different subjects capacity to exercise human freedom and create new beginnings in dialogue with others. Then the tensions between subjectivity and plurality, becomes crucial.

In a DPAR project where I collaborated with practitioners and young people, I experienced tensions related to language, the goal of exploration, power and habituated expectations. It also became clear how we all were influenced of the modern society’s ideas of scientific research. I found that the Norwegian philosopher, Jakob Meløe’s praxeology helped me to explore practice both *with* my collaborative partners, and from *within* practice. His theory can be understood as a kind of ethnographic practice–philosophic framework. It has many similarities with Yrjö Engström’s (2001) cultural-historical activity theory, aimed at helping those involved in research to explore each other’s views in agentive collaborative action, through critical dialoguing that recognises and recovers each participant’s place and voice in the world. Common for them both, is that they offer perspectives and questions for examining practice from within, that they seek understanding of situated, historical and contextual practice, and that they are concerned with socio-materiality. In this paper I will explore whether Meløe’s praxeological perspectives can give us concepts and terminology which can function as a frame for DPAR, with and within practices, and if such an approach can be helpful, handling tensions between research and practice.

After focusing the dialogical tradition of Action Research, I will explore some of the tensions which come to the surface in such collaboration, as I try to answer *why* there is a need to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production from within. Doing this it becomes clear that both the ontological question of what counts as knowledge and the epistemological question of how we get knowledge about the world comes to play. From here I go into the idea of praxis and practical knowledge, guided by Eikeland’s idea of the Aristotelian concepts of Praxis-based Theoria, describing DPAR as research with

How to go on? An ethnographic return to the ‘rough ground’ in PAR

Mark K. Watson

Abstract: Inspired by philosophical concerns with ordinary language, I write as a practitioner (and ethnographer) frustrated by how pictures of research that reduce action to quests for rational consensus seemingly blind people to the spontaneous and realistic pull that PAR exerts on participants to return to the “rough ground” of everyday life. Drawing on the case study of an Indigenous radio show in Montreal, I look ethnographically at the transformative qualities of Action (Research) as woven into participants’ response to the more ordinary and immediate question: how to go on? I suggest that what matters in participatory-action is not so much knowing or the failure to know than acknowledging and accepting (or accommodating or refusing) others’ positions and commitments.

Keywords: Participatory Action Research; ethnography; Wittgenstein; voice

¿Cómo Seguir Adelante? Un Retorno Etnográfico al “Terreno Áspero” en Investigación de Acción Participativa (IAP)

Resumen: Inspirado por las preocupaciones filosóficas sobre el lenguaje común, escribo como practicante (y etnógrafo) frustrado por cómo las representaciones de la investigación que reducen la acción a la búsqueda de consensos racionales aparentemente impiden a las personas ver el empuje espontáneo y realista que la IAP ejerce sobre los participantes para volver al “áspero terreno” del día a día. Partiendo del estudio de caso de un programa de radio indígena en Montreal, observo etnográficamente y de otras maneras las cualidades transformadoras de la (Investigación) Acción en cuanto que se teje como parte de las respuestas de las personas participantes a la pregunta más común e inmediata: ¿Cómo seguir? Sugiero que lo que importa en la acción-participativa no es tanto el saber, o la incapacidad de saber, sino el reconocimiento y aceptación (o acomodo o rechazo) de las posiciones y compromisos de los otros.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción Participativa; etnografía, Wittgenstein, radio comunitaria

February 2016: CKUT studios, Montreal

I am in the basement studio of CKUT90.3FM, a campus-community radio station in Montreal. It is early morning but everyone on the Inuit radio team is excited to hear Reggie’s voice.¹ A journalist from APTN, Canada’s national Indigenous broadcasting network, is also there.

1 Although all participants’ names are available in the public domain, I use pseudonyms throughout this paper.

Evan, the Inuk producer, gives a signal and the journalist starts filming over Alasie's shoulder as Reggie's voice is patched into the studio. "Is that you Reggie?," Alasie, the host, asks in Inuktitut, smiling as she adjusts her headphones with both hands to better catch Reggie's voice on the end of the line. "Yeah, it's me, it's me Alasie....I'm here" Reggie replies warmly. The journalist is doing a story about Alasie, a charismatic and much loved Inuit elder and social worker in Montreal, interviewing Reggie on *Nipivut*, the first Inuit radio show in southern Canada. Like a dispiritingly high number of Inuit in Montreal since the mid-1980s, Reggie had been living on and off the streets for a number of years. Calling in from a local shelter, he was on the radio that morning talking with Alasie about being in the news.

One bitterly cold night the previous week, Reggie had seen a young man huddled outside a McDonald's at a major intersection in the downtown core. As he tells Alasie in his own words, when he saw the boy he saw himself as a younger man, alone and struggling on the sidewalk; that is why, Reggie says, he crossed the street, knelt beside the boy and gave him his coat: "here, this'll make you warmer" he said. What Reggie didn't know was that the boy was not homeless but a student who had come up to Montreal for the weekend. His friend had been filming his "street experience" from a discrete distance across the way for a class project. Astonished by Reggie's selfless act, the students uploaded the video to YouTube. Within days it had gone viral. Word spread and journalists began contacting Reggie for interviews, APTN included, but Alasie, who knew Reggie well, was the first and only contact to speak to him about what had happened in Inuktitut.

That morning on *Nipivut*, Reggie got to express his story in his own words. When he put down the phone, Alasie wiped away the last of her tears. "Wow, that was emotional" she sighed, turning to tell the journalist that giving Reggie the opportunity to speak in Inuktitut had changed everything: "as soon as he started to talk about his life in Montreal," Alasie said, "he started crying and talking about his mother."

I watched the APTN national news run the story that night. The three minute segment spoke movingly of Alasie and Evan's commitment to mobilise the power of community radio to amplify the voices of Inuit, like Reggie's, across the island of Montreal and beyond. It also highlighted the transformative actions being taken *by* Inuit *for* Inuit in challenging the mostly negative portrayal of urban Inuit in the mainstream media. I felt, if only briefly, I had glimpsed change through participatory action happening in real time, but in ways that I knew I still could not quite yet grasp or find words for.

Introduction

Nipivut means "Our Voice" in Inuktitut. The bi-weekly radio show went to air in October 2015. It started as an "action" of a participatory social history project before becoming the cornerstone of a long-term Participatory Action Research (PAR) initiative organised around Montreal Inuit community development called "*Mobilising Nipivut | Mobilising Our Voice*". To be clear, by PAR I refer to a practice of action-oriented inquiry that directly benefits the individuals involved by prioritising their needs, agency and participation throughout the entire process (see Kindon, Pain & Kesby 2007). Drawing on the host Alasie's lifelong commitment to the well-being of fellow Inuit, the *Nipivut* show exemplified the intent of PAR in its attempt

Are action researchers mixed up? Reviewing and revising basic assumptions, concepts, and terminology in and by means of action research

Olav Eikeland, Søren Frimann, Lone Hersted and Julie Borup Jensen

Abstract: The article explores and discusses whether we as action researchers are undermining or subverting our own intuitions and intentions, or at least not doing justice to it, when mixing a) learning and exploration through individual and collective action and reflection, with b) elements from conventional research methods. The article's basic question: Can the intentions and results from a) be reduced to and validated fully or partly through b) conventional methods? Can we save the scientific legitimacy of action research by ultimately resorting to conventional methods and theories? What does action research uniquely add in relation to conventional learning, knowledge generation, and change projects? We discuss some challenges raised by questions like these, and suggest ways of handling them. After exploring ways of being "seduced" by conventional methods, we conclude by recommending a gnoseology to replace a one-dimensional epistemology, and by explaining and recommending the procedure of immanent critique as a way of developing insights and competencies from the inside of practices; i. e. a genuinely Action research method.

Keywords: basic historical concepts, conventional research methods, data, experiential learning, external relations, geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, gnoseology, immanent critique, inner inconsistencies

Están confundidos los investigadores de investigación-acción? Repasando y revisando supuestos básicos, conceptos y terminología in y por medio de la investigación-acción.

Resumen: El artículo explora y discute si nosotros como investigadores en investigación-acción estamos minando o subvertiendo nuestras propias intuiciones e intenciones, o al menos, no haciéndoles justicia cuando mezclamos a) aprendizaje y exploración a través de la acción y reflexión individual y colectiva, con b) elementos de los métodos convencionales de investigación. La pregunta básica del artículo es: ¿Pueden las intenciones y resultados de a) reducirse a, y ser completamente o parcialmente validados a través de, b) métodos convencionales? ¿Podemos salvar la legitimidad científica de la investigación acción recurriendo en última instancia a métodos y teorías convencionales? ¿Qué añade la investigación-acción que sea único en relación con el aprendizaje, la generación de conocimiento y proyectos de cambio convencionales? Discutimos algunos retos que se presentan a través de este tipo de preguntas, y sugerimos modos de gestionarlos. Después de explorar maneras de ser "seducidos" por métodos convencionales, concluimos recomendando una gnoseología que sustituya a la epistemología unidimensional, y explicando y recomendando el procedimiento de crítica immanente como una forma de desarrollar reflexiones y competencias desde dentro de las prácticas; es decir, un método genuinamente de investigación-acción.

Palabras clave: Conceptos históricos básicos, métodos de investigación convencionales, data, aprendizaje experiencial, relaciones externas, geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, gnoseología, crítica immanente, inconsistencias internas

In this article, we explore and discuss whether we are undermining or subverting our own intuitions and intentions as action researchers, or at least not doing justice to it, when mixing **a)** learning and exploration through individual and collective action and reflection, with **b)** elements from conventional research methods. The basic question in the article is: Can the intentions and results from **a)** be reduced to and validated fully or partly through **b)** conventional methods? Can we save the scientific legitimacy of action research by ultimately resorting to conventional methods and theories? What does action research uniquely add in relation to conventional learning, knowledge generation, and change projects? We discuss some challenges raised by questions like these, and suggest ways of handling them.

As authors, our common starting point is that many academic action researchers with their co-researchers, have a shared intuition that basically, action research searches for ways of learning and generating knowledge designed to reflect the diversity and complexity of human knowing and learning, and of different knowledge forms in modern organisations, in order to bring social research in more adequate directions. Of course, not everyone engaged in action research, shares this intuition, but are more pragmatic in their motivations. We, however, share an intuition about the importance of recognising diverse knowledge forms as starting points for developments, transcending *both* the simplified division between experiential learning and so-called data-based empirical research, *and* the similar split between “theory” and “data”. The challenge of overcoming divisions like these is, however, more than terminological. It is conceptual and methodological. Different ways of knowledge generation also take certain institutional forms with their divisions of labour, subconsciously for granted. Hence, the challenge is even institutional, concerning the fundamental division of labour between researchers and researched, knowers and known, on which our dominant modern research-culture is based. So, how could we possibly escape or transcend pre-given frameworks we are born and raised into, and necessarily exist within? Can they be dissolved (*Aufgehoben*) theoretically or practically? Due to space-restrictions, we limit our ambition in this article to indicating directions we consider promising for answers and solutions.

1. Current relationships between social research and society: institutionalized assumptions

Various forms of action research (Bradbury, 2015, Reason & Bradbury, 2001, 2008, Greenwood & Levin, 2007) and their relatives (Eikeland 2020) have, for decades, for different reasons, and under different designations, gained popularity in many professions, in management and organisation studies (Coghlan 2019, Hersted, Ness and Frimann 2020), community development (Bradbury et al. 2019, Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, Burns, 2013), and in other areas. The rising interest and spread of action research reflects broader societal changes concerning the social distribution of learning and knowledge generation. Since the scientific revolution in the 17th century, modernity has increasingly monopolised knowledge production

Discussion Paper: Response to *Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research*

Ken Dovey

This paper is a response to the paper entitled *On the Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research* by Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea, and Streck, published in the previous edition of the journal. Their paper raises several important and challenging issues upon which I offer my perspective. I have focussed upon the phenomenon of power and advocate a deeper understanding of the insidious nature of abstract forms of power. I argue that this involves the creation of practices through which such forms of power can be demystified in the interests of the development of *contextual literacy*, that is, the ability to “read” the socio-political contexts accurately and, thereby, ensure relevant strategic action. Creating this capability has implications for the development of new Action Researchers within the context of the Academy. Finally, I explore the challenges facing university-based Action Researchers in their demystification of the institutional power/logic that pre-empts political action through engagement with social movements committed to the protection of democratic ideals and social justice.

Recognising the centrality of power to the social construction of political realities

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of Action Research, a research methodology embedded in the social constructionist paradigm, underpin the position that social realities are politically constructed and reconstructed by those who wield the most effective forms of power. More important than agentic power, which is easily apprehended and thus open to contestation, are abstract forms of power that operate surreptitiously and insidiously. The demystification of abstract power, and its dynamics, is critical to the aspirational goal of Action Research to contribute to the social construction of political realities in which democratic ideals are realised. The complex task of accurately apprehending these forms of power and their insidious influence, however, constitutes a daunting proposition for those working towards this goal.

Power manifests in many complex forms and the invention of the sophisticated technical apparatus and associated algorithms that underpin insidious forms of surveillance, has added to the forms of abstract power that operate surreptitiously in the interests of power elites. Through such power, these elites facilitate the general experience of a socially constructed political reality as “taken-for-granted”; that is, of being a “natural” and “inevitable” phenomenon of life. Unable to apprehend these forms of power, potential opposition to them is

About my learning journey with Action Research

Interview with Danilo Streck

Richard and Miren:

How did you first encounter Action Research during your own academic career?

Danilo:

Thank you, Richard and Miren, for granting me the opportunity to speak about my experience with Action Research. As with most action researchers, I did not come across Action Research in my formal education in undergraduate or graduate courses. Research methods were usually about statistics. I came to Action Research first through systematisation of experiences with popular education in Latin America, at that time (1970–1980) in connection with CELADEC (Comisión Evangélica Latinoamericana de Educación Cristiana), supported by the World Council of Churches and other international social and ecclesial organisations that intended to connect grassroots movements in churches, NGOs and schools and universities. It was supposed to be an exercise of critical reflection on practice to promote change, inspired in the liberation movement, in areas such as pedagogy, theology and communication. This practice was rarely integrated with the academic work, and the material produced was dedicated to group leaders and social organisations. It also provided inputs for teaching materials for use within these organizations. Still today in Latin America, popular education and Participatory Research go hand in hand, and sometimes it is difficult to identify where one ends and the other begins. Paulo Freire's study of the generative themes for the literacy programme, as described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is a good example of how research and education are intertwined in the same process of knowing and changing one's world. A formal project of Action Research started with the study of Participatory Budgeting in South Brazil where we understood that we needed a participatory methodology to study participation. At that time, however, the research group was already pretty well acquainted with the literature of Action Research, from reports of systematization of experience to academic writings.

Richard and Miren:

How has your view of Action Research changed since then?

Danilo:

At the beginning of my work, as mentioned above, I was not involved with Action Research. The intention has been, and still is, to bridge the gap between practice and theory, based on the assumption that changes will be promoted by people in their respective social, professional and cultural context. I guess that during these years I became more aware of the relevance of critical reflection on our practice as professional academics. There is a serious risk of action becoming activism, and I think that I became more aware of the researcher's role as being a