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Editorial

# Special Issue: Conceptualising Action Research: Basic assumptions and terminology in Action Research

## Action Research on the rise

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

How do we conceptualise, communicate, and describe Action Research in a language which expresses and corresponds adequately to the basic assumptions behind Action Research? Our call for papers tried to pinpoint some very specific challenges for Action Research as we see it: As Action Researchers, when writing applications for research funds, when communicating research insights, when developing knowledge in collaboration with stakeholders, when reasoning and voicing knowledge in research communities, we often feel forced to navigate in a language field foreign to our Action Research activity, and compelled to use conventional, mostly interpretive social research terminology to legitimise our creation of knowledge as research. This language field is, to a large extent, still based on a principal division of labour between intellectual and manual work, knower and known, and researcher and researched, creating a horizon of meaning linked to a still dominant but old-fashioned and monopolised knowledge management regime. This terminology reflects an institutionalised but hardly validated division of labour in the understanding of social knowledge generation, othering the subjects of study. Thereby the more basic and radical knowledge generation processes happening in certain forms of Action Research are made almost invisible and stretched between the "inner" language of contextual knowledge and value production, and other, "outer" ways of communicating scientific knowledge and research insights presumed as valid by a wider research community and in society at large.

Nevertheless, Action Research gains popularity in different professions and professional studies, in management and organszation studies, community development work, and in other areas concerned with practical relevance, application, and development. The situation reflects societal changes concerning the social distribution of education and knowledge generation, from having been monopolised in specialised academic institutions to becoming much more socially distributed.

As indicated, social or human knowledge development and creation need to come to *its* own, and find its own form, similarly to how natural science and technology have come to their own during modernity. Bringing social and human knowledge to its own, however, does *not* mean imitation or emulation of natural science. Extant forms of inquiry all need to be critically examined, transformed, and adjusted to the radically practice based creation of knowledge in core Action Research.

Certain forms of practitioner Action Research are already making progress in their attempts at this by connecting to more colloquial and prevalent understandings of *experience* which do not operate within the divisions of conventional research. These attempts are si-

multaneously theoretical, empirical, methodological, and even simultaneously descriptive and normative, thereby challenging basic categories of modern research and societies.

Action Research is not alone in this, of course. Hence, when developing appropriate Action Research terminology, concepts, and language, we must critically let ourselves be inspired and learn from other schools of thought. The European tradition has several continuous critical strands (critical theory, phenomenology, hermeneutics, post-structuralism, social constructionism, etc.), which could and should be explored, mobilised, and utilised. Other, currently emerging attempts at developing terminology from indigenous, practitioner research, and other traditions need to be reviewed as well. A promising, emerging, and important *starting point* for developing concepts, terminology, and language could be basic historical concepts: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe.* Action Research needs to immerse itself in these and develop them through a form of immanent critique. Besides starting by connecting to established and emerging critical traditions and approaches, it is necessary to start by exploring the different *clashes* between Action Research and conventional terminology and understandings actually experienced by both researchers and practitioners in Action Research projects.

Therefore, this special issue called for papers that would join us in the search to find and develop new and proactive language, concepts, and practices to qualify research based on fundamental principles and approaches in Action Research. We called for papers that would e. g., summarise extant attempts at developing concepts and language more adequately adjusted to knowledge production from within practices, providing us with new voices in the cross-fields of tensions between various discourses and institutionalised practices in a field filled with research and practice dilemmas. The special issue also welcomed investigations of different *clashes of discourses* typically happening in Action Research which, from this, may lead to the development of new concepts and language. Our question was: What constitutes Action Research and how can it be communicated adequately? Not just for what purposes is Action Research useful, or how to perform given forms of Action Research. Or what justifications for given forms of Action Research exist already?

The call has resulted in several interesting papers expressing the variety of knowledge understandings, methodological developments and innovations, and research challenges that characterise the field of Action Research. However, a pattern seems to emerge across the received papers. They tend to reactivate well-known proposals for solutions to the problem formulated in the call, rather than going deeper into the above-mentioned discussions and implications of the challenges of language, terminology, and methods for communicating knowledge creation in Action Research. It is encouraging for the future, however, that so many Action Researchers feel the urge to contribute to this explorative journey.

Beside the final text written by the editors of the special issue, one article in particular, written by Catrine Halås, explores the fundamental discussion of what is at stake when addressing language in Action Research. In her article, *Praxeological Dialogues from within: handling tensions in Dialogical Praxis-oriented Action Research*, she both reflects on contemporary attempts to develop a comprehensive and adequate language for experience-based and contextual research. She does this by discussing many, including Eikeland's and Arendt's, philosophies of knowing, assessing them in relation to their applicability to the "lived practices" in Action Research. She finds that the Norwegian philosopher Jakob Meløe's *praxeology* can be used as an approach to collaborative knowledge development from within practice towards what she, using an Eikeland term, calls Praxis-based Theoria.

Inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, Meløe has developed a theory of cross-cutting language philosophy and action theory, influenced by perspectives from phenomenology and pragmatism, which she offers as an inspiration to Action Research and its language of knowledge / knowing.

The second article is written by Finn Thorbjørn Hansen and carries the title *What Would Apophatic Action Research Look Like?* The article presents and discusses how to consider delicate matters of silence and wonder from *within* the practice of Action Research. With inspiration from existential phenomenology, hermeneutics, and an "apophatic turn" in theology, philosophy, and art, the article argues for apophatic thinking in action research and encourages the reader to step back as an actor to let life or the phenomenon itself act upon him / her. The author asks the question: "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?" His answer is that we must arrive with a non-knowing, receiving, listening, and effortless action attitude, a kind of contemplative approach based on wondering. While drawing on Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Gadamer (among others), Hansen argues for a wonder-based and apophatic approach to language and experience through concepts of "non-knowing" and "effortless-action". As he writes, we must "arrive with a non-knowing, receiving, listening and effortless action attitude".

The third article *Action Research conceptualised in seven cornerstones as conditions for transforming education* by Christine Edwards-Groves and Karin Rönnerman traces philosophical and historical roots within the field of educational Action Research for providing relevant theory. It argues that inventing entirely new concepts is unnecessary. Instead, a deeper understanding of the historical traditions and the constitutive practices is emphasised. The definition of Action Research in educational Action Research draws on Carr and Kemmis, while the historical roots are traced back to for instance Dewey, Freire, Lewin as well as critical theory, *Bildung,* and folk enlightenment. Against this background, the authors re-frame the historical ideas formulated into seven principal cornerstones, linked to four basic features of Action Research: Inquiry for learning, real life action, critical theory, and democratic dialogues. The principles "*contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community"* create coherence and understanding of basic conditions in educational Action Research. It also conveys an integrated and deeper understanding of Action Research rooted in historical traditions, concepts, and terminology.

The fourth article has the title *How to Go On? An Ethnographic Return to the 'Rough Ground' in PAR,* and is written by Mark Watson. The article describes and discusses a project within the frame of participatory Action Research, which is centered around giving voice to the Inuit people living in Montreal, Canada, through their participation in community radio shows. The central idea of the community radio shows is the building of socially inclusive infrastructures that allow marginalised communities to obtain ownership over their own development through communication. In this perspective, community radio can be seen as a vehicle of self-empowerment where marginalised groups can express themselves in their own voice and their own language, in this case the Inuit language Inuktut. The article discusses the transformative potential of participatory Action Research (PAR) and contributes to the field of Action Research from an ethnographic perspective. The author argues that PAR should be

seen as a living process, "woven into the circumstances in which it takes place and in the interactions, both linguistic and social, that occur between people".

In the final article in this issue, *Are Action Researchers mixed up?* (blindly peer-reviewed like the other contributions), Eikeland, Frimann, Hersted, and Jensen, try to outline and elaborate some promising ways forward concerning the challenges from the call. This article pursues the authors' need to acknowledge that the language challenge is more fundamental than merely terminological. It exemplifies this through a critical discussion of the term "data". Starting from the word "data", they discuss the wider implications of such ingrained and institutionalised separation of contextual knowledge production on the one hand, and the different concepts of "theory", "data" or "experience", and "methods" on the other. This is an implication that needs to be more transparent and discussed.

Finally, as editors of this special issue, we wish to thank all the authors and the blind peer reviewers, who have spent their precious time in contributing to this issue. In addition, we would like to thank the editors- in-chief of the International Journal of Action Research, Danilo Streck and Miren Larrea, for being flexible and cooperative throughout the whole process.

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# 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 "agnoselogy". 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 nosotro 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 seems strangely to disapeare 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 calls us to act.

Recently, I have fund a need to re-conceptualise my own thinking in dialogue with the work of the Norweigian 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 giving 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

tradition of "via negativa". The crux of the matter being that one should *not* insist in giving a "name to the nameless" before the unutterable and deeply meaning-giving phenomena. Only with a silent, listening, and wondrous attitude and through negation, existential negative dialectics (cf. Kierkegaard), and a "negative and indirect approach" can the researcher, "thinker", or artist create a "pointing act" to that which cannot be conceptualised and spoken of or written directly about. The apophatic tradition posits that you can neither tell, show or do it, intentionally, but only point to it indirectly and negatively or through an 'effortless action' (*Wu Wei*).

You can find this kind of mystical and apophatic thinking and experiencing in both Western and Eastern philosophy as well as in different religious and spiritual practices (Franke, 2007, 2014, 2020; Rhodes, 2014; Cooper, 2002, 2018; Kukla, 2005; Fiumara, 2006). The basic mood (*Grundstimmung*) of the apophatic attitude is being in a fundamental contemplative wonder: in a 'touched non-knowing'. Or as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida so eloquently describes, "I am trying, precisely, to put myself at a point so that I do not know any longer where I am going" (Derrida quoted in Rubenstein, 2011, p. 133)

Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin are examples of thinkers who aspires to this kind of apophatic thinking (Franke, 2007b).

What would an Action Research, which is inspired by this kind of apophatic thinking and way of being, look like?

## Eikeland and Praxis Research

In two recent articles (Eikeland, 2012, 2015), Olav Eikeland circles in on a very special type of Action Research termed *Praxis Research.* As he argues, this method of understanding and practicing Action Research can probably be seen as the most foundational means of practicing Action Research when not merely conceptualising Action Research as an instrumental tool or as applied science but as *basic research* that is humanistic in and through itself. When conducting praxis research, the Action Researcher is doing research from *within* a practice itself, being in the midst of action, sensing what is at stake in a profession, and experiencing what the Action Researcher and participating practitioners ("co-inquirers") as actors are called to do in the specific "grammar" of this specific practice and this unique moment.

Eikeland's main philosophical inspiration is Aristotle (Eikeland, 2008), and he borrows Aristotle's notion of *praxis.* Briefly put, praxis is action and activities done without external goals or purposes. When in a praxis, the value of what you do and why you do it is intrinsic in the activities itself. When being praxis-minded, you do not take a walk in the forest *because* you have to do physical exercise as your physician has urged you to do. You take a walk in the forest because it *is* (or can be) a value in itself. As Eikeland says, "The end or objective is entailed in the activity itself as its own perfection, making it autotelic (meaning: carrying its end or telos within itself)" (Eikeland, 2012, p. 26).

One can say, as Aristotle appears to aspire to, that ethical actions and experiences, the action and experience of beauty, the search for truth and wisdom, as well as connecting with the gods through rituals and ceremonies: all these aesthetical, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual experiences and actions are praxis, and cannot be otherwise without harming or

reducing these acts and ways of being. On the other hand, the risk of making a sharp, black-and-white distinction between praxis and practice like this might isolate the search for beauty, goodness, and truth from everyday life; in particular, praxis-related activities in a neoliberal framework are easily reduced to entertainment in the private sphere. I believe that Aristotle would not have liked such a sharp distinction, but would prefer that we believe that this dimension must be integrated in our everyday life and function as the motor of our lives. Thus, there are numerous actions, activities, and performances in professional work life that are naturally and necessarily instrumental. Even professional *ethics* can be seen as a practice in a utilitarian and pragmatic context. However, this should not be seen as dubious or problematic by the Action Researcher conducting praxis research. It is only problematic if it is *only* this kind of practice-based and not praxis-based thinking and experiences which are recognised and examined.[1]

On another level, you will also be able to find instrumental practices that somehow transform into autotelic praxis. This might happen when, let us say, a carpenter becomes so experienced and entangled in the "callings" of the materials, that he or she goes from being a technician or apprentice in his profession to become an artist or master in his profession.

Eikeland (2007, 2012) indicates the practice-epistemology of Donald Schön and his notion of "reflection-in-practice" and "knowing-in-practice" as good examples of how we should, as action researchers, respect and find ways into what Eikeland terms "the grammar of practice". More precisely, he deliberately makes a distinction between *practice* and *praxis.* He recommends that the Action Researcher sees the difference between reflecting from within a practice which is instrumental or pragmatic in its nature and a praxis where the actions and activities are, so to speak, actions of the heart. In other words, actions that people are engaged in freely (the Greek word for this kind of free space and leisure time is *Skholê*), without external demands and motifs.

The strange thing is, as he points out, that something (a knowing-from-praxis) "shines through" in those moments in which the practitioner is unwillingly caught by the subject matter ("die Sache"), by that which calls the practitioner to act. To hear the call or see "die Sache shine through" is only possible for the very advanced practitioner: that is, the master of a profession or art. The apprentice has to "learn by doing" over several years in order to sense, what Eikeland calls, the "*gnoseology*" of a praxis (Eikeland, 2007). If that happens something "shines through" as a guiding light for the master of a profession.

> Apprentices approximate and train themselves into the same form or pattern by imitation, experimentation, dialogue, and supervision, not striving to become identical to a particular master but to what "shines through" the masterly practice. The form or pattern of a common standard, "die Sache", "saken", or the "what-it-means-to-do-or-be-something", is separable as reflectively reified in thinking, and, as such, separate from any individual master. (Eikeland, 2012, p. 38)

The way to reflectively separate in thinking "die Sache" or what this moment and praxis calls the master to do, is also described by Eikeland using another important keyword given by Aristotle: the concept of *theôria. Theôria* should not be confused with what we today call "theory". Aristotle makes a clear distinction between *epistêmê* and *theôria.* The first indicates what we understand as being theory-directed and governed by a non-interventionist approach: that is, from a so-called neutral, context-free, or "objective" viewpoint. In contrast, *theôria* is

1 I would like to thank Professor of Care Ethics, Carlo Leget, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht in The Netherlands, for bringing my attention to the need to soften up a too rigid distinction between praxis and practice.

generated from within practice, training, exercise, and habituation. As Eikeland explains, "It emerges from the habitus engendered through accumulated practical experience (*empeiria*) as an articulation of its forms and patterns (sifting differences and similarities)" (ibid., p. 39).

When Eikeland refers to *empeiria* as experience in *praxis*, he makes two fundamental distinctions when discussing experiences. One kind of experience is "*Erlebnis*", which is "merely momentary experience" (ibid., p. 25). Another kind is "*Erfahrung*", which is described as "accumulated practical experiences exercised/habituated into us" (ibid., pp. 24–25). When things immediately appear to us, we experience *Erlebnis* as a kind of subjective impression of a thing or phenomenon. However, knowing-in-praxis or "praxis knowledge" (Eikeland, 2012) requires that we are able to see beyond the mere subjective experience into more general patterns and structures (forms) *in* these experiences.

Inspired by Aristotle and Wittgenstein's language game theory, Eikeland refers to this kind of insider-knowledge as the silent "grammar" of an experience. We cannot think our way into an insight regarding this grammar in the praxis. Instead, we must "accumulate practical experiences exercised/habituated into us". Such *Erfahrung* is akin to virtue ethics, where you also have to live your way into these virtues, not only by having a "merely momentary experience" but through hard work: that is, through many repeated practices and exercises, moving from being a novice to becoming a virtuos master in a specific virtue or art.

Thus, *Erfahrung* is not the kind of knowledge that is created through a reflection from the outside of an experience or what Donald Schön (1983) terms "reflection-on-practice". *Erfahrung* is enlightened and shared in a reflective manner through another fundamental means. This is where Eikeland connects praxis to *theôria. Theôria* is insider-thinking in contrast to outsider-thinking. By "insider-thinking" Eikeland does not, of course, imply merely subjective idiosyncratic thinking. Rather, through his references to Aristotle (and shortly Plato and Wittgenstein), he refers to a dialogical and dialectical form of reflection-*in*-practice, or what he would describe as reflection from within: praxis-knowing led by so-called "*epistemological impulses*" (Eikeland, 2006a). By epistemological impulses, he refers to the sense one can have in a dialogue and community of inquiry around a shared experience that leads to the emergence of certain standards or common patterns or principles (a grammar) that become visible to reflective practitioners.

> For both Aristotle and Plato, moving "*up*" or "*in*" *to* an articulated insight in basic principles , i. e. common patterns, forms, and virtues of language use or similar activities: as novices or *from* how things appear to us phenomenologically here-and-now, goes explicitly and consciously through practice-based critical dialogue or dialectics, sifting and sorting, gathering and separating (cf. Eikeland, 1997, 2008). Dialogue was the Way (*hê hodôs*/Tao). (Eikeland, 2015, p. 386)

Thus, praxis research is a process of examining praxis experiences in a profession through critical reflection and dialogue or a "community of inquiry" (Eikeland, 2006b). By placing strong emphasis on the difference between practice and praxis in the Aristotelian sense, he also refines the notion of the "reflective practitioner" in a more non-pragmatic or non-utilitarian manner than Donald Schön does. What could be said now is that the kind of Action Research that Eikeland aspires to is not "practice epistemology", as Schön termed it, but a "praxis epistemology"(Hansen, 2016b). However, Eikeland does not call it that, but refers to it as "*gnoseology*" (Eikeland, 2007). He provides the following explanation in his article from 2012:

Praxis could and should be explored as a gnoseological paradigm for a different form of organisational science, based on reflective practitioner research where the knowers-practitioners study and develop their own practice and common standards working as collegial coordinating principles. (Eikeland, 2012, p. 27)

## In Search of "apophatic potentials" in the work of Eikeland's Conceptualisation of Praxis Research

I am empathetic to Eikeland's significant work to ground Action Research in a genuine insider or praxis-oriented conceptualisation. I also see some "apophatic potentials" and "tonalities" in his thinking that could be developed further. What I want to pay attention to here is three expressions taken from two of the above quotations of Eikeland: "shines through ", "die Sache", and "Tao". It is interesting that Eikeland – when attempting to conceptualise the special experience and manner of being that is at stake in reflection from within praxis – refers to phenomenological and hermeneutic notions and phrases such as "die Sache" and "shines through". To my surprise, he even briefly refers to Eastern practice philosophy when using the word "Tao", which is a keyword in Daoism and can be translated from Chinese as "the Way".

Eikeland appears to see a progression from being a novice when only seeing how things appear to them phenomenologically in their "here-and-now"-ness, to other kinds of critical reflective dialogue and dialectic practices that prepare the final path towards an insight into "die Sache" from within praxis. Moreover, the way or the method (in Greek: *hê hodôs*) appears comparable to The Way (Tao) of the Eastern practical philosophy of Daoism. To the best of my knowledge, Eikeland has not elaborated on what he phenomenologically or hermeneutically implies by expressions such as "shines through" and "die Sache", or how Action Research (particularly praxis research) can be seen from the Daoist perspective (Flavel & Luzar, 2019; Tan, 2020).

In what follows, I want to dwell upon the kind of dialectical dialogue and Way of Being (Tao), that may pave the way, so that "die Sache", so to speak, "shines through" in *praxis.* First, I unfold a few phenomenological insights regarding the relationship between language and experience or the concept and life impression. Here, I focus on the existential phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics with reference to Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Gadamer. They can also guide us to dwell upon the nature of dialogue when it becomes critical and reflective in a dialectical and existential sense.

Thereafter, I show that these kinds of reflections open for a more wonder-based and apophatic approach to language and experience through concepts of "non-knowing" and "effortless-action", which is expressed with a "Daoist accent". I lastly propose this by referring to a concrete Action Research project by which I am inspired; a wonder-based approach that may help us to refine our thinking of the nuances between "reflection-in-action" and "wonders-in-action", between a "community of inquiry" and a "community of wonder", between "epistemological impulses" and "ontological impulses"; as well as why I find it important in praxis research to make a distinction between a "gnoseology" and a "a-gnoseology", the later being a concept that is connected to the tradition of apophatic thinking (Franke, 2014, 2020).

The "apophatic way" of doing Action Research can, I will suggest, help the Action Researcher to see beyond even "praxis knowledge" and the grammar of praxis in order to

sense the *light* ("die Sache") that "shines through" this praxis and grammar. These suggestions for distinctions and my pointing towards what an apophatic Action Research may look like can of course, due to the scope of this article, only be in the form of dense sketches or conceivable pointers.

## What We May Learn From Existential Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Some of the most original thoughts and ideas in existential phenomenology can be found in the thinking of the Danish philosopher of existence, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). In his philosophical dissertation entitled *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* (1989/1841), he raises the following question: What happens when we conceptualise things, phenomena and events around us and within us?

Kierkegaard writes (long time before Husserl reflected on phenomenology and Heidegger reflected on existential hermeneutics) that in order to conceptualise a phenomenon, say irony, one must approach the phenomenon like a reverent knight in front of his beloved maiden. The viewer of a phenomenon must be like a lover, where no features of the phenomenon escape from his caring eyes. When the viewer brings with him a concept to capture the essence and wonder of a phenomenon, Kierkegaard reminds us to be rather cautious, so that the phenomenon remains inviolated and "…that the concept be seen as coming into existence [tilblivende] through the phenomenon" (Kierkegaard, 1989/1841, p. 9).

Kierkegaard then goes on in a hermeneutic manner to note that a concept, just like an individual, has its history and cannot resist the dominion of time. But, "…in and through it all they nevertheless harbor a kind of homesickness for the place for their birth" (ibid.). In his philosophy of existence, Kierkegaard is attempting to navigate his way through the underwater skerries of subjectivism and idealism. Neither the poetic romantism of Goethe and Schiller nor the German philosophical idealism of Hegel and Schelling was the basis of his thinking. His negative and existential dialectics keeps alive the gulf or incommensurability between expression and impression, language and lived experience, thought and life. The existential or transcendent "spark" is ignited when this unbridgeable tension is at its highest: that is, when the human being experiences an excess of meaningfulness that goes beyond what is possible to articulate or express in discursive thoughts and representational language.

This meaningfulness might be "translated" and pointed to like in a pointing act through art, philosophy, or spiritual exercises, as elaborated by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Buber, and the German philosopher Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1968; Franke, 2007, p. 121–136). However, this "spark" can so easily be turned off by an aestheticism, philosophical metaphysics, or mysticism. In all three cases, the error is the tendency of "anthropo-centrism", which is found in art if it is based only on an "inner feeling" or lived experience of the artists, or in philosophy when thinking has become metaphysical system-building, or in mystical contemplation when this contemplation is governed by clear methods of spiritual technics and "esoteric knowing". What Kierkegaard repeatedly attempts to indicate is the *wonder* of nature, things, and human beings and indeed also the Sacred that he finds in "the Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air" (Kierkegaard, 2018/1849; Mjaaland, 2021). Kierkegaard can be described as an apophatic thinker embedded in Christian negative theology (Kline, 2017).

Heidegger and Gadamer were not religious thinkers, but they were substantially influenced by the existential and negative dialectics of Kierkegaard and his apophatic indication towards that which cannot be spoken directly about and expressed in discursive thinking, but only indirectly communicated and lived: that is, through silence, irony, humor, paradoxes, contradictions, actions, or through art, philosophising, and contemplative practices that bring the person into an existential longing, wonder, and listening to a call that can only be heard in deep wonder and silence or by *living* the phenomenon that one wonders at.

When Heidegger talked about "die Sache' and about "shining through", he was indeed displaying a similarity with Kierkegaard. Similarly, when Gadamer (1998, 2006) discussed the difference between practice and *praxis*, theory and *theôria*, and "dead meaning" versus "living meaning", he too was very much in resonance with the apophatic thinking of Kierkegaard.

To summarise Heidegger's philosophy (see Capobianco 2011, 2015), one could say that Heidegger worked with three fundamental horizons in his philosophy: the ontic, ontological, and apophatic horizons. Each horizon has a foreground and a background on which the dimensions of the phenomenon or human being either become visible in the foreground or are withheld in the background. According to Heidegger, these distinctions are only to be understood as analytical distinctions. In real time, when being-in-the-world as a human being engaged in practices, these three horizons are at play all the time in every situation. However, the single human being, or specific group of people, may only be aware or focused or in resonance with a few of these horizons or foregrounds and backgrounds in the singular moment or approach to practice and the life they are living.

## Being in the Ontic Horizon: "Ready-to-hand" and "Present-at-hand"

Heidegger terms the foreground that is at play in the ontic horizon as "present-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*) and the background as "ready-to-hand"(*Zuhandenheit*).

When we make the world around us and in front of us "present-at-hand" we are either in the pragmatic, instrumental, and problem-solving modes (what Aristotle described as knowledge-approaches, like *techne*). Or, we are in a scientific, theoretical, and detached "objective" analytical and reflective mode (what Aristotle described as *episteme*). When we employ utilitarian, problem-solving methods and entrepreneurship practices or conduct scientific and empirical studies in ways that would satisfy the methodological ideal of science (Gadamer, 2006), then we are in a process and intention and a sort of conceptualisation that aims to make the world knowable, calculable, and disposable.

To be in the world seen from the perspective of "ready-to-hand"(*Zuhandenheit*) is to be in the world in a embodied and intuitive manner. In moments of "ready-to-hand", the human being can be deeply immersed into the action or activity that he or she is engaged in. Donald Schön (1983) was one of the first modern practice theorists to reflect on the specific knowledge and reflections that only can emerge out of being in practice. Thus, when he talks about "reflection-in-action" as opposed to "reflection-on-action" or about being a "reflective practitioner", he turns our awareness to the special kind of practice grammar or insider knowledge that is incarnated in a particular practice or profession. He is critical towards "the

instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique" (Schön, 1983, p. 21). Technical rationality resides in "high-hard ground" and is disconnected from the "swampy lowland" of practitioners in real life. Schön is only one example of practice researchers out of many who make us aware of the invisible or tacit embodied background that is often taken for granted or overlooked in common professional and more technical and method-driven professions. Another example is Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus.

## Being in the Ontological Horizon: Dasein and Sein

In their book *Mind over Machin*e (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1988) they introduced the concept of "the intuitive expert". However, Hubert Dreyfus (2004) later revealed that when they wrote that book they were not sufficiently precise in their description of the subtle dimensions that are at play when professionals become experts or "masters" in their field. Hubert Dreyfus turns to Heidegger and his distinction between the ontic and ontological and argues that an even deeper dimension than "ready-to-hand" can be conceptualised and elaborated upon in moments in which experts become *existentially* aware of their 'being-in-the-world', referring to a key notion in Heidegger's masterpiece *Being and Time* (1995/1927). The difference between "*the intuitive expert*'"who is intuitively governed by the tacit grammar of everyday understanding and practice culture of a specific profession, and the existential "*radical world-discloser*", which is the new name Hubert Dreyfus brings to bear in his later writings, is that the latter has existentially chosen the life and the practices he or she is engaging in. Dreyfus argues that this makes the practitioner even more present in his or her practice.

Hubert Dreyfus also connects to Heidegger's reception of Aristotle when Heidegger describes Aristotle's concept of "*phronesis*"(practical wisdom) as a way of being that has to do with being "authentically present in the moment". Heidegger sees an intimate connection between practical wisdom (*phronesis*) that is related to the concrete existential (*Dasein*) dimension on the one hand, and on the other hand what can best be described as apophatic wisdom (*Sophia*), which Heidegger connects to an ontological and mystical dimension (*Seyn*). If wisdom per se is readiness to see an act inspired by eternity *in* the temporal, the infinity *in* the finite, the ontological *in* the ontic, then *phronesis* can be described as being in an existential and creative fidelity towards the infinity ("die Sache") in the finite conditions of the moment. Hence, *Sophia* can be understood as the sense of wonder and intimations that direct our longings and aspirations towards that ("die Sache"), which transcends finite conditions, languages and grammar[2] of the moment and practices.

2 The notion of "grammar" read through an existential interpretation of Wittgenstein (Braver, 2014) opens up a critique that points to the Being-dimension beyond the grammar and practice of a language.

## Being in the Apophatic and Ethical Horizons: Seyn and Gelassenheit

Heidegger connects *phronesis* to conscience and existential reflection: that is, to *Dasein* and the existential moment in time (the *Augenblick*). On the other hand, *Sophia* is a kind of apophatic and ethical wisdom, which transcends *Dasein* and the ontological horizon of *Sein. Sophia* is connected to Eternity, to nature itself (in Greek: *Physis*) or *Seyn* (Capobianco, 2015), which can never be grasped, with nature or *Seyn* here being the enigmatic essence ("wesen") of things[3].

This kind of apophatic and wordless insight of nature itself can only be approached in wonder (in Greek: thaumazein) (Capobianco, 2011, pp. 70–86) and what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit*, which can be translated to a "letting-be" and "letting-come" attitude towards phenomena. When being in that contemplative, open, receiving, and wondrous mode, the phenomenon in question appears to wake up and talk back, or grasp for a short self-forgetting moment the questioner so that he or she "is", or "lives", the phenomenon in that very moment. To be caught in this manner by wonder and the phenomenon as an event (Heidegger calls it an "*Ereignis*") that happens *to* you as a researcher or practitioner is to arrive to the third apophatic horizon, with the former being respectively the ontic and ontological horizon.

## Six Apophatic Additions to Eikeland's Praxis Action Research

Now, I want to summarise the insights that are provided to the Action Researcher who wishes to be inspired by the existential phenomenology and hermeneutics, and by the apophatic dimensions that are inherent in this kind of contemplative philosophical thinking (*theôria*) and practice (*praxis*). In Apophatic Action Research, it is suggested that the Action Researcher

1) make a distinction between discussing experiences: both affective experiences (*Erlebnis*) and cognitive experience (*Erfahrung*)[4], in two different ways. Either as "ontic experiences" or "ontological experiences".

2) make a distinction between listening to the "epistemological impulses" on the one hand and "*ontological impulses"* on the other hand. When following epistemological impulses, the focus is on reflecting critical and analytical aspects from within the grammar of the lived experience and praxis. When following ontological impulses, the focus is on being in deep contemplative wonder ("thinking" in the sense that Heidegger (2004/1954) discussed from within the lived experience and praxis.

3) make a phenomenological difference being in a "community of inquiry" where the analytical and critical reflection is at the centre, and being in a "community of wonder", where the existential reflection and contemplative wonder and apophatic aspirations are in the centre.

4) reflect and dwell upon experiences from practice and praxis on fundamentally three different levels or horizons. These are a) the pragmatic and ontic "*knowledge level"*, b) the existential and ontological "*being level*" and c) the ethical and apophatic "*mystery level"* (see also Visse, Hansen & Leget, 2019).

3 Interestingly, Heidegger's notion of *Seyn* and *Gelassenheit* have receptively been connected to *Tao* and effortless actions (*Wu-Wei*); see for example May (1989).

4 Here, by *Erfahrung* I mean the cognitively processed experience, which of course also includes an affective level; whereas in *Erlebnis*, we are only engaged on an affective level.

5) add two more role models when conducting insider or praxis action research. Where "the reflective practitioner" is to be found on the ontic knowledge level of practice research, "*the philosophical practitioner"* and "*the contemplative practitioner*" could then be included as role models for the "being level" and "mystery level", respectively, of the praxis research. By "philosophical practitioner", I do not narrowly relate to professional academic philosophy, but to the existential praxis of "the love of wisdom" as a way and art of living (cf. Hadot, 1995). Therefore, aesthetical praxis can also be found on this "being level". In addition, by "the contemplative practitioner", I imply the kind of spiritual exercises that can be found in art, philosophy, and theology in the apophatic tradition and praxis (Franke, 2007a, 2007b).

6) instead of only discussing "reflection-in-action" and "knowledge-in-action", we can now add "wonder-in-action" and "non-knowing-in-action" at the "being level", and "wonders-in-action" at the "mystery level". "Wonder-in-action" and "non-knowing-in-action" refer to the specific existential and philosophical kinds of wonder, which can emerge when being grasped by a phenomenon and when attempting to actively understand it phenomenologically and hermeneutically. To wonder *about* something is what we normally do in critical and analytical thinking as well as in scientific and problem-solving approaches in general. This is also called "inquisitive wonder". But to wonder about something is not the same as to wonder *at* something. The latter is termed "contemplative wonder" (Schinkel, 2021). My conception of "wonder-in-action" is related to the contemplative form of wonderment.

On the other hand, "wonder*s*-in-action" are the epiphanic moments when you gaze into *a* wonder and wonder at it from *within* it. This is comparable with what the French ethical phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion calls the experience of the "saturated phenomenon" (Marion, 2002): that is, the proto or "Ur" phenomenon in and by itself. In these wonderful moments of "in-seeing", you are in a passive receiving mode and even lifted and pushed into action. I suggest that this could also be interpreted as moments of "Tao"and "effortless action", where it is not you who are the agent but the phenomenon in itself and by itself. In Daoisme, they call these moments "effortless actions" (*Wu-Wei*)[5]. This kind of Insider or praxis research that is driven by a wondrous non-action and non-knowing and by a deep sense of wonder is better described as an "a-gnoseology" and, therefore, not strictly identical with the "gnoseolog"', which Eikeland talks about. Or to be more precise, an apophatic Action Research is agnosiological (from the Greek word *agnosia*; see Rhodes, 2014).

## To Live the Phenomenon and to Act Wisely Through 'Wonders-in-action': A Conclusion

Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher and art performance critic, once wrote the following sentence when giving advice on how to write thoughtfully: "The work is the death mask of its conception" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 459). This sentence beautifully captures the crux of the matter in how I understand "*die Sache* "and what is meant by its "shining through" the concrete practice and the language, which is used to give expression to this "die Sache-in-work". What Benjamin meant by this sentence is, that in the moment when "die Sache" has

5 I do not have sufficient space in this article to elaborate further on this. I can instead refer to a few research articles on practice research described and criticized from a Daoistic perspective (Flavel & Luzar, 2019; Tan, 2020).

been put into language and at work in a concrete practice and context, we really only experience the "death mask" of *die Sache. Die Sache* has then coagulated into the structures and patterns (the grammar) of the lifeform and practice that it is caught in.

Then, my interpretation is that if we, as Action Researchers, only focus on the "grammar" of a practice as well as a praxis, we might only see its "death mask". What we need to do in order to sense what "shines through" as the living meaning of "*die Sache*"(cf. Gadamer) is to listen and look for that which is not yet embodied in a practice pattern or a practitioner's practice-intuition but can only be heard and intimated from within a philosophising (wondrous) and contemplative (sensuous and artful) practitioner.

In the experiences of philosophy and art, as Gadamer (2006) reminds us, we can find gateways to a transcendence experience of truth, the good, and the beautiful. I am of the opinion that Eikeland, when emphasising praxis instead of practice, and in the moments of *Skholê* and wisdom (*phronesis* and *Sophia)* as well as the importance of philosophical dialogues, he is indeed pointing in the same direction but from an "epistemological impulse" and horizon. When thinking (or listening, seeing, acting, and being) from within an "ontological impulse" and horizon, or even from an apophatic impulse and horizon of "non-knowing" and "effortless-action"', we just add new perspectives and openings to understand and to "be with" or near the Ur-phenomenon ("die Sache").

It is important to say that these horizons and impulses or levels of seeing must be described and understood as just as valuable for Action Research and as natural parts of different professional practices. Action Research can by no means be seen as one thing, as one entity. Of course, apophatic Action Research is only of relevance in certain cases and particularly when wanting to inquire into existential, aesthetic, ethical experiences and events and phenomena of an ineffable nature.

I will end this article by referring shortly to one concrete Action Research project in which the relevance of Walter Benjamin's words and my notions of "wonder-in-action" and "wonders-in-action" became very present for me and my co-inquirers.

This project was sponsored by the Danish Art Foundation and ran from 2019–2021. In this project, I worked with a few performing artists from an art performance group called Carte Blanche, who particularly wanted to inquire into how one can artistically create and philosophically understand spaces of wonder in public settings ( Jensen, 2021). I followed them in their one year-long preparation and creation of an art performance called "Tom Rum" (Empty Spaces). This Action Research project also illustrated the relevance of the *three dimensions* (knowledge, being, and mystery) in doing apophatic Action Research, and whats new, it also pointed to *four different ways of seeing* when working as an apophatic Action Researcher. This became clear to us during our dialogues and ongoing reflections on their preparation work, artistic experiments, and creative flow of ideas as well as my mutual philosophical reflections upon and my wonder at their actions and thoughts.[6]

The first way of seeing is to ***look at*** something in a kind of detached and theoretical, instrumental, or utilitarian manner. Language is typically technical, discursive, and representational. It is the language of the outsider. In the art of writing one will criticise this kind of writing by saying 'Don't tell it, Show it! We are here remaining in the ontic and knowledge-expression dimension.

6 The following division among four ways of seeing in Action Research is also inspired by my own work on design pedagogy (Hansen, 2014, pp. 251–252) and Herholdt-Lomholdt (2017, p. 173), although she does not elaborate these levels from a Heideggerian and apophatic perspective.

The second way of seeing is exactly a way of seeing by not discussing it but by showing it. I call this to ***see with the field:*** that is, with the "grammar" of the practice. The traditional "natural theatre" as well as the "epic theatre" is aware of this "practical art wisdom" of showing and not telling. As apophatic Action Researchers, we say that here we work with on the ontic *practice and praxis epistemological* dimension.

I learned the third way of seeing when the performing artists said, 'Do not even try to show it, *see it!*' In their sensuous and meditative manner of just being there, they told me how they repeatedly find themselves in a kind of pure presence, and although they had done a specific scene many times, almost every evening for weeks, they told me (and I also experienced it when I was occasionally a part of the performance) that they always felt as if this moment was completely new, as if they did it for the first time. I call this third way of seeing (See it!) to ***see from within*** your felt presence of the phenomenon. This is what I term the existential and ontological being-dimension of praxis. In these moments, the existential self (*Dasein*) of the action researcher and practitioner are called into being (*Sein*) in order to be present enough to hear, through a sense of wonder, what goes *beyond* both the cognitive I and the existential self.

Lastly, I call the fourth way of seeing ***being seen by it*** or ***seeing in virtue of it.*** This is indeed a strange moment, where you feel appropriate due to the phenomenon rather than you appropriate it or merely sense it from within your own presence. Walter Benjamin described this moment as a moment when the phenomenon suddenly appears to open its eyes and look back at the observer (see Conty, 2013), or as the Swiss art painter Paul Klee writes in his notebook *The Thinking Eye*, "now objects perceive me" (Klee, 1969). This kind of being seen or being appropriated by the situation or phenomenon itself could be described by the credo, "Be seen *by it!*" This is when the researcher and practitioner are in resonance with the Mystery-dimension of praxis. This experience indeed was what the performance artists in "Tom Rum" returned to when they wanted to point at what they perceived as the deepest level of their artistic creation. This is not the moment when you see something happen in front of you, and you gaze at it in amazement from within your own state of mind; no, this moment, can better be described as a moment of effortless action. In these moments, you *become* the phenomenon, or situation, or better you become appropriated by the phenomenon or situation. It is as if the situation or phenomenon acts through you. Or as the British poet Yeats says: "There is no performance, just life, when the dancer becomes the dance!"

For the apophatic Action Researcher, this is the Tao or moment of effortless-action and non-knowing. To become nothing or empty in order to serve the moment or phenomenon itself. This is the place where one can experience "wonders-in-action". You could also say that the performance actors repeatedly, every evening during the performances, attempted to defreeze the "death mask" of their art work not merely to repeat or fall into the rhythm of already made patterns and structures (or the grammar) of their art praxis.

The insights that these artists worked with is not only relevant for practice and the praxis of artistic creation. *Die Sache* and such callings from situations and how a sense of wonder can make the practitioner better hear this calling is also relevant for other professions like nursing. I have shown this in other Action Research projects where I worked with so-called Wonder Labs (Hansen, 2016a; Hansen & Jørgensen, 2021). Here, nurses at hospice and hospitals experienced how it is to be in wonder-based dialogues and communities of wonder, and how this nurtured their ability to 'see' their profession in the four different ways I have described above.

However, how we more concretely worked with these Wonder Labs is another story. Here, I end in the hope that the reader now may see the relevance of and also wants to work further on the question 'What would an apophatic Action Research look like?'

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# 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 establece 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 noteably, 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 methods[1] (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.

"projects" to be undertaken, or as just another activity to be checked off. This move has ultimately risks severing Action Research from its deeply historical foundations: foundations that established it as a way of approaching education and educational change (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021).

Action Research has been recognised for its critical importance for student learning, teacher and leader practice development and school-based change. But our intent in this article is not to redescribe the fundamental purposes, processes or models of Action Research (or its derivatives), these are well reported and theorised by others (see especially, Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kemmis et al., 2014b; Revans, 1982; Rönnerman, 2022; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Nor is the purpose to report on specific Action Research projects undertaken by individual educators or systems[2]. Rather our purpose is to give a theoretical contribution to the field of Action Research by retracing the genesis of Action Research in education to strive for deeply coherent understandings of the practices, conditions and influences of participating, and what this means for reinstating its core democratic values open to critical inquiry, rethought purposeful action, and systematic responsive development in education. We intend to present seven cornerstones, not separately of one another, but as conditions that facilitate democratic transformation towards the site. This to avoid the trap of falling into a technical view of Action Research. We believe in the global time of schooling, Action Research is an easy way out for policymakers to grab (c.f. Somekh & Zeicnher, 2009) in the believe doing the right choice for the professionals. But Action Research is more than a one-size fits all. Action Research is about professionals getting involved in inquiries for a better place to learn for both students and teachers. It must be internal, turned to the site. For this to happen we argue the conditions, presented as seven cornerstones are important to be aware of, and furthermore how they all are shaping and shaped by its practice architectures (will be outlined further down).

We will begin the article by defining Action Research followed by a short presentation of the theory of practice architecture, a theory we use as a lens for analysing our arguments. The next section is a try of historising Action Research, and give four principles that have been around Action Research for almost a hundred years. After that each of the seven cornerstones are presented. The article will be closed by a discussion of its contribution of viewing Action Research, not as a technical activity, but as professionals driving the transformation of education by being in education and open to their agency.

## Defining Action Research

As a backdrop we turn to Carr and Kemmis' (1986) early definition of Action Research arguing that it is a critical and participatory approach for practitioners seeking to improve

a) aspects of [their] own practice,
b) [their] understanding of [their] practice, and
c) [their] understanding of the situation in which [their] practice takes place (p.164).

These goals form an important fundamental about the nature and purpose of Action Research: that is, it is not simply enough to change an aspect of practice by doing "a project". But

2 See full descriptions or reports of recent Action Research projects in, for example, Edwards-Groves & Davidson (2017) and Rönnerman (2022).

understandings about the practices, the site and the circumstances which influence the practice must also accompany the endeavour. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p.1) later drew out more explicitly the social, collective and participatory ambitions of Action Research in this crystallisation:

> 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 these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.

Decades later, findings from our own research (see Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2013; Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021; Rönnerman & Edwards-Groves, 2012) further identified a fourth promising goal to add to Carr and Kemmis' (1986) earlier characterisation. That Action Research, when conceptualised as a stance and practiced as a "way of being an educator" (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021, p. 87), has the potential to be generative of professional transformations of an individual's identities, practices and positions that extend beyond the life of the "the project" and in that way transform education. To explain, Action Research supports aspirational practitioners seeking longer term change and development to their own and others professional circumstances to improve possibilities for career progression where the benefits of participation (at one point in time):

d) extend beyond "the life of the project" to generate educational leading capacities (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021, p. 62).

Our focus centres on how these four aspirations (a-d) of Action Research *in practice* can be constructively reframed around seven identified cornerstones (contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community; outlined in a later section) that give rise to sustainable transformation for individuals and collectives in schools. This is particularly possible when the aspirations and practices of Action Research are understood as an educational stance generative of practices that recognisably go beyond the life of the actual, generally provisional time-bounded, project.

Next a brief introduction to the theory of practice architectures that provides the theoretical basis of the paper will be presented. In the subsequent section we trace some philosophical roots of Action Research to rescript its promise for educational formation and transformation for contemporary times. It maps the historical landscape of Action Research as a foundation from which to understand the nature and the conditions of promise and possibility that Action Research provides for learners and leaders of professional learning.

## Theoretical framing

In this article we use the theory of practice architectures to frame Action Research as a practice. The theory of practice architectures is a social theory which draws close attention to the history and site ontological conduct of practices and the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social political arrangements that influence and shape practices. These arrangements or conditions are described as practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014b). Practice architectures are the shaping, organising and influencing arrangements that form conditions that hold a practice (for instance teaching, pro-

fessional learning, leading or researching) in place. The intricate connection between practice architectures and practices is drawn out here by Kemmis et al. (2014b, p.31), who define practice as

> a form of socially established co-operative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings); and that this complex of sayings, doings and relatings 'hang together' in a distinctive project.

According to the theory of practice architectures, to identify the distinctiveness of practices the particular sayings, doings and relatings that form and hold the practice together in a project (or intention) must be recognised and understood by the practitioners involved at the time. Practices are always mediated (enabled and constrained) by practice architectures or conditions that influence how a practice of one kind or another happens among people in particular sites like in meeting rooms or classrooms in a school. Furthermore, practices unfold temporally in real time, and are always prefigured, although not necessarily pre-determined, by historical conditions like political and intellectual traditions in a field or like the circumstances (remarkable or mundane) that are present at the time (Kemmis et al., 2014b). That is, a practice happening in the here and now is always:

- informed and influenced by the past (language, actions, interactions, relationships, activities, policies, traditions and culture);
- in motion experienced in the sayings, doings and relatings that simultaneously generate the activity, discourses and interactions between people (as interlocutors) that unfold through physical space-time (Schatzki, 2002), and configured by the physical set-ups and resources and power relationships 'in play' at the time; and
- contingent on and influenced by other practices and practice architectures then and there (like teaching is influenced student learning needs and by professional development or policy directives and political discourses).

So, according to the theory of practice architectures, to understand Action Research as it is practiced today it is necessary to consider how the practices and practice architectures are inextricably connected to its broad history set down in the past by philosophers, theorists and indeed by practitioners of practices.

## Historicising Action Research

Historically, Action Research has been part of the evolution of practices in many cultures across the world, developing and responding to particular local, social, political and economic conditions. So historicising practices, such as Action Rresearch, requires understanding the genesis of the traditions and practices that shape its conduct which exist and evolve in history as practice traditions (Hardy & Edwards-Groves, 2016; Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021; Rönnerman, 2022). As such particular practice traditions prefigure, as well as inform, practices as they adapt, through their enactment, to changing times, participants and locally experienced circumstances.

Democracy and education have been intricately connected for well over a century. In particular, the work of the progressive and philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) has been foundational for thinking about democratic ways of working and learning in modern education. In 1916, Dewey claimed that "education is a social process, is growth and that education is not preparation for life but is life itself" (cited from Säljö 2022). This single sentence shows how more than a century ago Dewey argued for education to be considered as manifestly enmeshed in everyday life and development. To be sustainable, education must harbour democratic values, and at stake is education itself. At that time, his pedagogic creed (1897) turned attention away from solely an emphasis on either the individual (Rousseau, 1712–1778) or society (Durkheim, 1858–1917) to bring into balance a view of education whereby learning for individuals is inextricably related to being in community with others. In his view, notions of sociality, community and communication are brought to bear on education practices that must, at the same time, strive for the formation of active and informed citizens for a democratic way of life.

Paulo Freire is another important philosopher and educationalist striving for democratic values. In his renowned book 'Pedagogy of the oppressed' (1970) notions of critical theory, action and activism emerged as monumental standpoints in and for education and its progressive development in places. His viewpoint stressed that education is only educational if it demands an active and emboldened citizenship that relies on both the individual and society: on both individual and collective action and activism. In Freire's terms, this position for committed action and activism forms critical understandings necessary for preserving, yet advancing, Action Research as contemporary education development practice: one that contributes to an active social citizenship and communitarian ways of being. These create conditions necessary for empowering human agency of local peoples seeking to change their local circumstances.

In parallel with Dewey and Freire's thinking about education, are ideals that rise from continental traditions such as Bildning[3] and folk enlightenment (specifically recognised in Northern Europe). These historical traditions place virtue in democratic, communitarian and activist ways of working (Ponte & Rönnerman, 2009; Rönnerman & Salo, 2012). They are traditions which shape practices that both aspire and transpire principles of education that create possibilities, and indeed practice architectures, for democratic, communitarian and activist ways of working. Like Dewey and Freire, Bildning and folk enlightenment attend assiduously to the fundamental recognition of "place" in education and its development. Intrinsically, therefore, theorising, researching and transforming education practices through Action Research practices requires a site ontological approach whereby critical understandings about the conditions that influence what happens in particular site emerge as necessary considerations for the action to be meaningful and enduring. For Action Research as a democratic education practice, it needs to be understood from within the context from which it is practised. Consequently, through critical and purposeful inquiry and action it must connect to, take account of and respond to the historical and local conditions and circumstances present in local sites and situations. In the following section we present four distinctive principles that have been around for a long time.

3 Bildning is Swedish and can be translated into English as bildung or cultivating. It has its roots in the Continental tradition of Education (c.f. Ponte & Rönnerman, 2009)

## Four central principles: Tracing the red thread

For decades, Action Research has made waves across the education and professional development landscape around four central principles, that even today influence how action research is understood and practiced:

*Inquiry for learning* was acknowledged early by Dewey (1916) as the fundamental way for individuals and collectives to focus on establishing more grounded solidified knowledge about one's own practice, arguing that to be able to change practice one must understand it from the situation from where the practices occur. *Inquiry remains one of the most central principles of Action Research.*

*Real life action/experiments*, exemplified by the work of German American psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), proposes that all stakeholders in educational circumstances must gather as partners to participate in processes of site-based inquiry that included planning, acting, observing and evaluating actions. *Understanding the realities of practices of all practitioners in local sites and circumstances sits at the core of Action Research.*

*Critical theory* emphasises ways that critical and emancipatory dimensions of learning are manifest through purposeful, intentional and strategic action along with individual and collective activism among people. This provides a trajectory for individuals and collectives to be able to transform their immediate and longer-term situations (e. g. Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Freire, 1970; Sachs, 2004; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001) making possible self-determination, self-expression and self-development (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). *Approaching practice with a critical and discerning eye committed to focusing on what actually happens in the day-to-day realities of life, opens up spaces for self-determination, self-expression and self-development.*

*Democratic dialogues* form a practice espousing that opening communicative spaces (Habermas, 1987) among personnel at a workplace, where they meet to reflect and discuss what happens in practice is essential for forming, reforming and transforming practices (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Dewey emphasised that learning takes place in the company of others particularly when groups of people reflect on, discuss and interrogate their shared experiences. He, as did Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Rönnerman et al. (2015), stressed that researchers, teachers and students become equal partners while meeting as interlocutors in conversations (Dewey, 1916; Gustavsson,1996). *Participating in open critical dialogues is the core of Action Research as it creates possibilities for those present to share and critique experiences and challenge each other's thinking about what is learned and happening in focused ways next.*

The critical stance that underpins these ideas provides a platform for Action Research by suggesting that it is the issues and concerns influencing one's own circumstances which are the very provocations that stir people to action and reflection on those actions in critical and transformational ways. That is to say that Action Research, across time and places, is not associated with docility, but a certain kind of practice that espouses dynamism and activism, practices which necessitates being critical and participatory (Kemmis, et al., 2014b). Action Research has had an enduring influence on education and development, exploring the dualism between theory and practice, between research and practical action, between reflection and action, between individuals and collectives, between schooling and education. Action research has according to Somekh and Zeichner (2009) a discursive power because it embodies a collision of terms as it is a combination of "generating research knowledge and improving social action at the same time" (p. 5).

The next section of the paper enlivens the traditions and philosophies that prefigure, yet embody, contemporary professional learning practices. It will draw out what we describe as seven Action Research cornerstones. The cornerstones: contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community, were derived from an extensive review of the literature that led us to view Action Research from its historical principle overwhelmingly concerned with being a democratic way of working and not just doing. We argue that these cornerstones are intertwined and dependent on one another, and by that fulfill the conditions for Action Research to take place in which the four principles (presented above)

are possible to build further on here and now. We find history important because of a noticeable hybridisation, fragmentation and even decontextualisation of Action Research whereby Action Research has been reduced to strategies, policies or just simply a research method, movements rejected by Carr and Kemmis (2005) and unpacked by Somekh and Zeichner (2009). Whilst we recognise that Action Research and its derivatives have been shaped and reshaped as ideas and practices travel through history responding to local sites, issues and circumstances, we notice a monumental shift towards using slimmed down glossed versions of what we consider to be the foundational interrelated cornerstones of Action Research.

To explain, in some jurisdictions Action Research (as an overarching concept) has been recruited as a silver bullet for education development. But it is evident that some approaches to it have been pared-back to such an extent that core understandings of its genesis are sidelined, and connections to its fundamental principles for transforming practices in local sites lacking. More problematic is the morphing of some key terminology describing action research to trendy vernacular as part of targeted publicity campaigns for attracting its pay-for-use in organisations (including departments of education) has fundamentally shifted understandings away from its core principles and processes. Further, the tendency to popularise elements of Action Research into a formulaic recipe for success, ultimately puts at risk its overall efficacy for generating sustained or sustainable change in schools. That is, there is a propensity that when the "packaged-up project" is completed, default or entrenched prior practices return, making any shift in practice susceptible to being short-lived or negligible in the longer term.

Cherry-picking popular terms to suit particular political or bureaucratic agendas, simply does mean change is imminent or even possible. It is our view that it is basically misguided to think that if a group of teachers are, for example, re-organised or re-labelled as a "community of practice" or "an inquiry community" or a "professional learning community" that their practices will change (in some mysterious ethereal way) without all necessary conditions (or practice architectures) that will support its conduct in place. This importation of such ideas and terminologies into the everyday discourses of professional change also rise against the deeply grounded intentions of, for example, Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger (1998) considerations of communities of practice, and what practices constitute development in a highly effective professional learning community. Furthermore, the propensity to represent such movements *as* Action Research, has emerged as a simplistic nominalisation which acts as persuasive devices for engaging groups of practitioners "in the project". In many cases, rather than being employed as a longer term systematic processual approach that genuinely supports teachers to take a more critical stance towards their professional circumstances and development, superficial applications hover above the realities of the local sites and conditions. Indeed, notions such as professional learning communities, communities of practice, collegial learning or inquiry learning have become such clichéd, overused phrases that real solutions to site-based change and development are cast into doubt. And not very seldom are externally implied by policy or delivery of policy that we believe will not transform education. Rather Action Research is internal and conducted by professionals to use their agency in the site in contribution to transformation.

Answering questions related to site-based change and development must attend to the practice architectures, and the practice traditions that shape educational action and change over time. Thus tracing the red thread that form the connections between past and present practices leads us to heed the caution raised by Dewey (1938) that new movements and new

practices do not simply supplant tradition (as suggested above), for these "may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively" (p. 20). This brings us back to our core argument calling for renewing Action Research in ways that gives credence and elevation to the primacy of its historical roots through the seven cornerstones we describe next, and so legitimising current practices, interpretations and purposive actions. We contend that facing contemporary issues and concerns in a range of educational circumstances through recognising the cornerstones of Action Research counters the superficiality of some current renderings that may indeed risk the stance required to be, and develop as, an educator (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021).

## Seven cornerstones that bring coherence to the foundations of Action Research

The aim of describing each of the seven cornerstones that follow are twofold: to (1) show the historical thread that holds the idea(l)s, aspirations and practices of Action Research together in site based education development (Kemmis et al., 2014b); and (2) show that they are precariously and delicately balanced where "each is "integral", in the sense that it is an indispensable aspect of the other" (to borrow from Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 221). The cornerstones: contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community, form constituent practices and practice architectures for each other. Although the cornerstones are inextricably connected and made comprehensible in light of the realities of a kaleidoscope of interdependent practices as they are encountered in real life happenings, they are deliberately organised in a way that we consider to be decidedly temporal. For example, in our view one cannot truly get to being a "community" without the other cornerstones as conditions for development in place. We begin with "contextuality" since it is the site and it is the particular distinctive "contextual configurations" (Goodwin, 2000) that enable and constrain what actually happens in places among people then and there.

### Contextuality: a cornerstone for site based education development

Responsivity to the particularity of sites and circumstances in education relates to Theodore Schatzki's (2002) notion of site ontologies. According to Schatzki (2002), then Kemmis et al. (2014b), contextuality is a position that draws attention to the distinctiveness of contexts and their peculiar, nuanced, historical and ontological situatedness (and local happeningness) of the practices that come to pass in particular places at particular times. As Goodwin (2000) proposed, it is in contexts where the simultaneous use of talk and action in interactions between people that creates the context for the doing of practices. Put simply, context matters. Furthermore, "What works in one setting does not always work in another" (Timperley, Kaser & Halbert, 2014, p.4). So, a site ontological view of Action Research foregrounds and presupposes and shapes the here-and-now of Action Research, where the site is important, which also leads us to believe there is no "best practice" to copy from another site or to be mandated by any external stakeholder. It rather concerns how practices unfold over time in

ways that are prefigured and transformed through and in interactions that take place at particular sites.

## Commitment: a cornerstone for (individual and collective) change

Commitment in action research can be understood in two interconnected ways. It firstly relates to an individual's commitment to and collective interest in a project or program of change (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Secondly, it connects to the related concept of educational praxis. Commitment forms a keystone for the viability, durability and legitimacy of Action Research as a practice; that is, Action Research is not possible unless there is an overt commitment to the processes and practices of change (even those that are contested and messy). Commitment to changing practices requires a strong sense of the site at the outset. In a fundamental way, an aspiration of education has always been to act in morally committed, ethically informed and prudently practiced ways (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & Smith, 2008). This requires deliberateness in one's actions and practices (and so their sayings, doings and relatings, Kemmis et al., 2014b). Taking a praxis approach to education and educational change and the practices which comprise it, means understanding one's own individual praxis. In Action Research we view commitment to change and development as re-professionalising teaching and teacher learning, since it moves beyond the epistemological and technical dimensions of the work of the teacher to account for the practical wisdom and moral judgements required to act in the moment (Edwards-Groves, 2008).

## Communication: a cornerstone for participation and intersubjective meaning making

Communication is the centrepiece of the human experience. It is a part of sociality that comes to life as people encounter one another through their interactions in practices of one kind or another. In professional life, communication is given shape by arrangements, or practice architectures, such as reflection groups, deliberative dialogues, collegial conversations, coaching conversations, peer-group mentoring or staff meetings (which are not activities to be taken as action research on their own). These communicative formations have, for many decades, formed a central dimension of Action Research and professional learning in different contexts. These approaches reflect a commitment to communication, building upon Dewey's advocacy for democratic ways of working (1916) whereby sociality is considered a pivotal practice in educational work. Alongside Dewey's dialogic principles are communicative practices (such as study circles, research circles and dialogue conferences) that can be traced back to the Nordic traditions of folk enlightenment and bildning (Rönnerman & Salo, 2012; Rönnerman et al., 2008). Emanating from these traditions is an alignment between the key idea that dialogue is instrumental for learning and the work on communicative space and communicative action developed by theorist Jürgen Habermas (1987). Educational theorist Etienne Wenger (1998, pp. 72–73) drew importance to three interrelated communicative practices "mutual engagement", "joint enterprise" and "shared repertoire" for what we understand in contemporary times, for establishing the necessary conditions for professional

collaborations in critical participatory Action Research (Kemmis, et el., 2014b), and so grounds for 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to develop.

## Collaboration: a cornerstone for collective action

Collaboration and collaborative learning have long been regarded as a self-improving and democratic way of working in education, particularly with respect to teachers' professional development (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021; Kemmis et al., 2014a; Nehring & Fitzsimmons, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006). It is possible when interpersonal communication is open, fair and equitable and there is individual and collective commitment to developing practices for the best of intentions in a particular context (a site). Collaborative endeavours form a dimension of social life fundamental for democratic ways of working. As an education practice collaboration for the societal good is steeped in traditional ways of learning that rests on the recognition of the inherent value of workers coming together to learn together about their professional work. This connects directly to bildning; that is, a "free" process of gaining general knowledge and of (folk) enlightenment that underlines the importance of interaction, discussion and dialogue in knowledge creation, or in Sörlin′s words (2019, p. 212) "we need to know more together". As such, collaborating within groups is a dynamic and democratic way to promote and develop participants' knowledge and experiences (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010), and confidence to be critical, evoke contradictions and resolve tensions.

## Criticality: a cornerstone for critical inquiry and activism

Critical inquiry and critical reflection are given primacy in contemporary professional learning especially critical participatory Action Research (Kemmis, et al., 2014a). These two dimensions of professional development work form cornerstones for critique and action, and open the way for activism in education. Dewey (1933) captures this eloquently when he says, "we do not learn from experience… we learn from reflecting on experience". Here he suggests that it is not simply the action or experience alone that provides the foundation for learning, but that it is the reflection *on* those actions and experiences that act as shaping practices for informing future actions. For instance, research circles (Holmstrand & Härnsten, 2003) emerged in Sweden in the 1960–70 s as a practice aimed to develop deeper understanding about the political conditions affecting the working lives of people and what was happening in the industrial sector. These traditions are deeply entrenched in the need for the critical examination of conditions that shape practices, and have been taken up for progressing professional thinking and practical action in critical reflective practitioner research (e. g., Schön, 1983).

## Collegiality: a cornerstone for professional sustainability

Collegiality and collegial learning can only come from deep engagement with critical ideas with others (Smeets & Ponte, 2009). From this perspective, criticality, collaboration and communication enable collegiality to develop as an evolutionary process; that is, collegiality is not a priori for Action Research but if the conditions of communication, collaboration and

criticality are present it has the potential to emerge from it. Furthermore, these ideas about collegiality and learning together form conditions necessary for professional learning and action research that have travelled over time and through practices associated with professions like teaching. Practices that enable collegiality have long been associated with Action Research, particularly in continental traditions that we have described elsewhere (see also Ponte & Rönnerman, 2009; Rönnerman et al., 2008; Rönnerman & Salo, 2014), notions that Dewey first emphasised early in the 20th century. Collegiality emerges in an advocacy for the school as a democratic organisation where Dewey considered it essential not just teach about democracy but let the work be conducted in democratic ways; that is, through communicating and collaborating with others collegiality is possible. In Dewey's proposal, educational leaders, teachers and students (collectively) are called to review the validity of their subjective knowledge and to test their assumptions through discussions and analysis through collaborating in a shared communicative space.

## Community: a cornerstone for democratic ways of working

Spaces for professional learning and educational Action Research can only legitimately be described as a community when communication, collaboration, critical reflection and collegiality in response to site-based contexts or conditions are present. Together these cornerstones create practice architectures (or cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements) that make being a community possible: that is, they prefigure but not necessary predetermine what happens. A community forms over time; and so realistically a community (or sense of it) does not happen instantaneously (like simply following a script, a recipe, a model or a cycle). It requires practices and practice architectures that enable it to 'become' what it ascribes to be *in practice.* So, we argue that communities are always a process of becoming, and as Edwards-Groves (2013) showed, participating in a group or community of professionals learning together is a dynamic intersubjective ever-evolving practice that "re-form(s) and renew(s) itself and its particular social arrangements in a continual process of endless becoming" (p. 24). To this we add, once a sense of community is accomplished by attending to each of the other cornerstones, then relational trust can be secured (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021; Edwards-Groves et al., 2016). On this, working in community with others further provides what Kemmis et al. (2014a,b) describe as creating necessary conditions for critical, participatory Action Research.

## In summary: Seven cornerstones of action research

Each cornerstone, described briefly above and summarised here, can be traced to its own historical traditions, and constituted by its own particular practices that have shaped their existence over continents and decades. The cornerstones form an interconnected platform for considering the historical significance of the kind of contemporary in-practice individual and collective criticality needed for Action Research. These are practices which seek out, challenge and critique research and evidence through participatory approaches that empower teachers to *act in*, *act on*, and *act for* their own professional development. Importantly, we

argue that each cornerstone is a practice architecture (or shaping condition) for the other; that is, each is 'integral' to and forms an indispensable intrinsically connected part of the other.

1. **Contextuality:** a cornerstone for site based education development
2. **Commitment:** a cornerstone for individual and collective change
3. **Communication:** a cornerstone for participation and intersubjective meaning making
4. **Collaboration:** a cornerstone for collective action
5. **Criticality:** a cornerstone for critical inquiry and activism
6. **Collegiality:** a cornerstone for sustainability
7. **Community:** a cornerstone for democratic ways of working.

It is our view that a sense of community can only be developed if those persons present are responsive to particular contexts there and then; and are genuinely committed to communicate and collaborate with one another over time. Further, being free and open to criticality rests on one's experiences of collegiality, collaboration and communication with others. Each of these are ideas that connect to theoretical and practice premises of democratic ways of being espoused by the folk enlightenment.

To conclude, Action Research is not the same as collaboration, nor is it the same as for instance professional or collegial learning, communities of practice, critical reflection or teacher inquiry. Rather, we suggest, Action Research is formed by a constellation of integrated and interrelated practices derived from a broad history of distinct education traditions: to form what we describe here as the cornerstones of and for Action Research. We stress that it is through participating in contextually relevant and responsive practices that are open for groups of people with a shared commitment to learning, communicating, reflecting and collaborating with each other as colleagues, that collegiality and criticality emerge sedimented in true communities of practices.

By conceptualising the seven cornerstones in contemporary language and ideas as we have, we reinvigorate and reinstate what was old, not new. It is our belief that these cornerstones connect contemporary practices of Action Research *as* situated professional learning, and to some of the historical idea(l)s from which they have emerged. We consider each of the cornerstones to be practice architectures for the practices of Action Research and professional learning. They are a guide, not a blueprint (to borrow from Stenhouse, 1975) that reframe current representations of Action Research that not only accord strongly with Deweyan democratic principles, but (at the same time) form virtues for education and its development *in practice.*

## The contribution of the understanding the cornerstones of Action Research

In this last section, we argue there is no need to invent new concepts for Action Research, rather there is a need for participants to form deeper understandings of the historical traditions and their constituent practices already well established and defined. We have aligned this historical connection with the formation of the seven cornerstones. These principles of the cornerstones are not new, but rather are re-framed historical ideas which bring coherence to understanding the core conditions for educational Action Research that for over a century has

been shown to be an educational stance generative of practices that recognisably go beyond the life of the actual, generally provisional time-bounded, project. By connecting the cornerstones to the four principles of Action Research presented previously, we argue for the importance of looking back at history by using the knowledge already there, act presently for a better education for students and teachers and strive for a sustainable future by being able to transform education being better adjusted to knowledge production from within practices,

Yet there is a need to heed the caution expressed by Rönnerman and Salo (2014), who argued it is easy to get lost in practice when decontextualised appropriations and misappropriations make it difficult to get one's hands on what the innovations actually mean for one's own practice. And as Green (2009) suggested, the discourses of practice are so ubiquitous that the integrity and meanings are often lost in language through the conflation, overuse and misappropriation of ideas. For example, some innovations (like inquiry circles or dialogue groups) masquerade as action research, subsequently reinventing action research and its constituent practices as the *flavour of the month* where the rhetoric around their implementation reduces their relevance to espousements or clichés: for example, we are a community of practice because we work at the same school. Ultimately, we argue the need to look intensively beyond the rhetoric. This would open up the possibility to reclaim the essence of democracy in Action Research as a space for systematic attention to the site which creates conditions for learning and leading in education development. These conditions make contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community possible.

In many ways the central ideas captured in this paper are not new. Where we differ, or perhaps extend understandings about Action Research, is that these cornerstones framed as assemblages of coherent and logically organised bundles of core idea(ls) are intrinsically related to one another in practice; each form shaping conditions (practice architectures) or perhaps pre-conditions for the other. Recharacterising the dimensions of Action Research as interconnected cornerstones recognises these as core virtues of action research that both espouse and demonstrate democratic ways of working. As a practical example, taken together the cornerstones, formed the foundation for the particular generative conditions that action research affords its participants, and indeed, how the practices encountered in action research lay grounds for leadership development (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2021). As Kemmis said (2009), Action Research is a practice-changing practice, and therefore as a practice forms history-making action where its conduct is always prefigured by other practices.

Historising Action Research generated a virtuous activity that rightly makes the historical work of philosophers, seminal educational theorists and intellectual traditions meaningful to contemporary proponents of site-based formation, reformation and transformation. Specifically, this provided the impetus to assemble to cornerstones as conduits to history, and representations of the conditions and core principles of Action Research. By using the theory of practice architectures as a theoretical and linguistic resource for understanding and analysing practices presented a fresh perspective on the transformative nature of Action Research as professional learning that goes beyond its immediate influence on teaching and improvement. Its interest in history provides an account of practice that enables the analyst to trace it prior to and beyond the life of the (action research) project. Notably,

> These historical traces are not "just history", "the past", "what's done and dusted": somehow divorced from present conditions and circumstance. Rather, these historical traces are key elements, key parts of the architecture of practice,

> the 'practice architectures' which we recognise as influencing current practices… Acknowledging and valuing how current day practices, and their associated doings, sayings and relatings, are not just site-based but deeply historically embedded, enables us to better understand the conditions for practice, and how more productive conditions might be brought about in practice, and supported in policy. (Hardy & Edwards-Groves, 2016, n.p)

Tracing Action Research back to its roots and meaning in education, means historicising practices (Hardy & Edwards-Groves, 2016). It shows how particular practices are prefigured by history; coming to exist in practice over time in ways that form historical traces that leave remnants from the past on moments in the present.

To conclude our argument, we assert a need to retain the term Action Research, but to bring it with integrity to new generations, this must accompany deeper understandings about its historical traditions, concepts and terminology. We endeavoured to do so by historicising Action Research based on seven clearly identifiable cornerstones that capture the concepts, traditions and terminology more faithfully and in ways better adjusted to knowledge production from within practices.

## Conclusion

In this article we have argued that framing the understandings about the nature of Action Research for educational formation, reformation and transformation in terms of the seven cornerstones, contributes to contemporary interpretations and practices derived from strong historical foundations. It is our position that the cornerstones account for, acknowledge and extend traditional perspectives and descriptions to deepen understandings about the generative possibilities of Action Research in ways that do not neglect or lose sight of its core historical connections and democratic virtues. To conceptualise Action Research only as a project suggests an unwarranted provisionality, and promotes unwanted limitations to its robustness and possibilities for site based education development and transformation. Therefore, there is a need to find a more trenchant grounding to invest in Action Research if critical inquiry, rethought purposeful action, and systematic responsive development in education is sought. Particularly in response to the current intensification of educational accountabilities, we argue that this move shifts the conversation to be about the need for educational systems to invest in Action Research as an approach to developing and sustaining a durable transformative culture in education.

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# 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

and within. Altogether, this helps me to address the needs, of what Meløe's praxeology should contribute to answering. Then I will describe Meløes's praxeology, after which I will discuss his contribution, whether his perspectives fit as a framework for DPAR with and within, and if it helps us to handle tensions between practice and research.

## The Dialogical tradition of Action Research

Action Research is development-oriented research in a field of practice and is carried out with and not about or on the subject area (Nielsen, 2004). It represents a family of research approaches, builds on different ontological and epistemological positions, and at the same time with some commonalities, featuring (1) action, which refers to creating and implementing new practices, (2) research, which refers to contributing to new theory and also to generating and testing new knowledge; and (3) participation, which is about placing a strong value on democracy and control over one's life situations (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). By nature it is context-bound where both practice and knowledge are developed through a cyclical process of concrete experiments and learning (Hiim, 2020).

This paper explores Action Research within a dialogical tradition, where the main focus is about organising meeting places for dialogue and power as a free discourse; collective reflection and broad participation, aimed at the organisation's goals and tasks, are in focus (Eikeland, 2012a). Within this tradition, the researcher does not "speak science" or otherwise attempt to teach scientific theory to the real-world practitioner, but instead attempts to speak the language of the practitioner and accepts her as the expert on his organisation and its problems (Mårtensson & Lee, 2004). The researcher's main responsibility is to facilitate dialogues, making conditions for everyone to be able to express themselves and be heard, and for collective reflection, learning, and development (Eikeland, 2012b). The idea is that change emerges from the collaborative dialogue between different but at the same time equal participants. When we change the way we think, we can also create change in our environment. This way, knowledge can be understood as that which makes possible or inhibits change (Halås, 2021).

Compared with functionalist approaches to action research, processes in dialogical approaches become more open toward multiple pathways, more explorative, and more complex than merely "solving problems" and giving "the right answers" (Hersted et al., 2020). Also within this tradition researchers ground their work differently, for example leaning toward phenomenological or social constructionist frameworks of understanding. As I see it, the Aristotelian concept of praxis transcends this, allowing us to explore practice at one side as something old; as experienced and habituated, and at the same time as something new, that emerges and in some way is created or constructed when we reflect upon intentions and future opportunities. It is both about to grasp practice as being and becoming, in a movement from the past to the future.

Bakhtin (1984) has given us perspectives for understanding the dialogue as a part of the human condition, the basis for human development and understanding in the world, and as an idea of exploring and developing understanding by allowing different voices to speak. He was interested in the situated socio-political nature of language and people and the spatially and

temporally situated nature of the word. He believed in the unfinalisability of the human being, emphasising the open-endedness of dialogue and inquisitiveness about the power of language. For him, our being in the world could not be expressed in one truth, because they are future oriented, situated anticipations, whose function is to enable individual people to coordinate their actions in achieving socially shared outcomes.

This leads us to dialogues empowering potential, and the idea of dialogues as a deliberating process, for emancipating the participants from the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Here Hannah Arendt's (1958) thoughts of democratic subjectivity, can help us illuminate the goal of dialogical action research. Based on the Aristotelian distinctions between poiesis and praxis, Arendt described three forms of human action; labour, work and action. Building on this, David Coulter (2002) discuss what counts as action in Action Research, and shows how different conceptions of action involve different relationships with theory and knowledge. *Poiesis* is a kind of action that is connected to labour and work, directed at accomplishing a predetermined end, while *praxis* is a kind of ethical action, that cannot be determined in advance, but must be discovered and acted by the subject in particular contexts and situations. Hanna Arendt described subjectivity as the freedom to create new beginnings, where the outcome of dialogue in this kind of Action Research, is directed at acknowledging and deliberating the different subjects capacity to exercise human freedom in democratic dialogue with others (ibid). Then you need to find the balance between subjectivity and plurality. This leads us right into the tensions of dialogical Action Research. What could these tensions look like?

## Addressing and handling tensions

In my Ph.d project, I collaborated with young people, participating in a rehabilitation program, and their professional helpers, doing action research (Halås, 2012). We established a learning community, where we worked together for two years, aiming to both develop the local practice and at the same time develop some kind of general knowledge about effective approaches facing young people in vulnerable life situations. Through the project the learning community invited also other stakeholders to dialogues and the experiences was disseminated in a collaborative written report.

Tensions quickly came to the surface. The dissertation highlights and discusses dilemmas and tensions related to (a) the language of knowledge, where a tension became visible between the researcher's academic written language on the one hand, and my collaborative partner's[1] everyday oral and partly bodily and action-based expressions, on the other hand. Another tension could be linked to (b) the goal of the collaboration, where tensions and dilemmas emerged between the goal of empowerment and the desire for the collaboration to contribute to raising awareness, learning, and strengthening the participants' capacity to act on the one hand and the goal of contributing to the collective development of more general knowledge on the other hand (Halås, 2021). This further led to a description of tensions

1 There are differences between the positions and prerequisites of the professionals and the young people, which I choose not to address in this paper.

related to (c) power-relations, both in terms of the power relationship between the three partners (young people, professionals, and the researcher) and relation to external actors, both in terms of the local community, municipal actors and higher authorities and structures. The dissertation shows how power, based on earlier experiences and habituated forms of collaboration, was expressed in the partner's both oral and silenced expectations of each other. This could be related to both the researcher's and the participants' habitual gaze and preconceptions, which both the young people, professionals, and researcher, in the beginning, was blind to, but which came to the surface in the collaboration. In the beginning, my collaborative partners (both the youngsters and the professionals) had so great a respect for me, that they did not challenge my sayings or doings. And for me as a researcher, it became clear that I had ambivalent expectations of my role.

At the same time as I, informed by the idea of practical knowledge, expressed a goal to do research from within and to contribute to liberating and equal dialogues, I after some time became aware of my experience of having a "ghost of evidence" sitting on my shoulder:

> The ghost asks me if this is research? …(…)… The ghost says that it is not good enough, without heavy theoretical discussions related to the empirical data. In other words, it casts doubt on the durability of my hermeneutic and phenomenologically oriented approach, and of the theories related to participatory research, on which I have based my work. (Halås, 2012, p 175, my translation).

This might be connected to what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe as the holy positivist trinity: Generalisation, reliability, and validity, referring to the logic of the natural sciences, giving an idea of evidential scientific knowledge as causal, measurable, neutral, cognitive, universal, generalisable, timeless and replicable. What struck me, was that this experience of the ghost of evidence shows how this claim of evidence not only came from outside but was also embodied in my thinking and acting, informing my reactions to situations. Moreover, it was fighting inside me against this paradigm of practical knowledge that introduced me to a different form of validation of knowledge, focusing on the unique, situated, contextual, embodied, and time-bound, a perspective more occupied with the process of knowing than knowledge as a transferable product.

All this could be used as an argument that the researcher might not only need an understanding and willingness to turn to practice from within, but also that there is a need to find approaches and language helping her to address and handle tensions related to language, the goal of exploration, power and habituated expectations. Could it be possible to find approaches help restraining my inner ghost of evidence? To find a language that could help gaining a natural attitude of everyday life (Mårtensson & Lee, 2004), and bring words back from their metaphysics to their everyday use (Wittgenstein,1953). But before I go into that question, there is a need to look further into the ontological question about our understandings of what kind of knowledge we seek to develop, and the epistemological question about how we believe we can get this kind of knowledge of the world.

## Praxis-based Theoria

A professional is characterized by the fact that she must use judgment to find out how abstract knowledge, such as psychology, sociology, and law, can be used and expressed in specific

situations. In the face of new people, situations, and challenges, the professional must sense, interpret and create what we can call practical syntheses (Grimen, 2008). In this way, knowledge is transformed into practical knowledge that is expressed in the professional's action, as knowledge in action and knowledgeable doing (Gherardi, 2018). A skilled practitioner is consciously or unconsciously able to meet and respond to the challenges she faces in specific situations. The question of what is right or good practice, and what is valid knowledge, is thus linked to the situation. The concept of practice does not only connect "knowing" with "doing", but also become an array between saying, doing and relating (Kemmis, 2012) and seeing (Gherardi, 2018). Practice then becomes the container of tacit and elusive knowledges, sensible and embodied ways of knowing. Where "seeing" is taken as the bodily activity representative for all sensible knowing, like hearing, tasting and touching (ibid). In this way we could talk about a process of knowing, where knowing is an enactment and accomplishment, rather than a static property. Professional knowledge is in permanent flux, always practiced for another first time (ibid), where the practitioner masters and puts together different fields, forms and sources of knowledge (Halås, 2018), and acts upon this.

Aristotle's perspectives help us further to see how different forms of activities and knowledge, are woven into each other (Aristotle & Rabbås, 1999). Episteme is often explained to be science-based knowledge, which is knowledge of the immutable and the regular. This is often linked to what can be proven and tried. Anyone who possesses such knowledge knows why and how, but does not necessarily need to be able to act based on this knowledge. Techne is described as skills knowledge, and it is the knowledge that shows itself in the form of practical skills. This means that you can trade, produce or create something, but do not necessarily know why you should do it. Phronesis is the knowledge that implies that one has insight and understanding regarding what one does and why one does it, and when one should do what. She who has phronesis can act wisely based on her understandings. This means integrating the knowledge into active action.

The Norwegian working life researcher and philosopher Olav Eikeland (2008, 2015, 2018) offers a deepening understanding of Aristoteles ideas that can help us to further clarify. He understands *'praxis'* as practitioner knowledge, divided among those who are within and part of the community of practice as knowledge subjects. Praxis depends on the existence of a relationship between colleagues who share common standards for how a business should be run professionally (Eikeland, 2018). He relates this to the concept of concord, sharing common understandings: constituted through lógos or reasoned speech, not only in face-to-face relations, but within large linguistic and conceptual communities (Eikeland, 2015).

He makes a distinction between Theoresis and Theoria. As earlier mentioned, the concept of episteme often is understood as knowledge of the immutable. Eikeland interprets the gnoseology of Aristoteles in another way. He finds that there are two kinds of episteme: Episteme[2]) connected to Theoresis, the common forms outside the subject, and episteme[1]) connected to Theoria, as insight, where knower and knowledge is one, or coincide. He refers to how certain aspects of human existence can be described based on scientific ideas that relate to more or less stable and unchanging objects and aspects of existence, which are expressed in Theoresis. However, man is more than nature, he is also culture, which is changeable, which shapes and is shaped by humans, and in constant motion. Here, praxis is a form of knowledge that relates to man as a meaning-creating being.

In the same way that Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) describe professional development from beginner to expert, Eikeland describes the practice as a path of initiation or perfection from

beginner to virtuoso. He argues that the Aristotelian path of perfection or practice is twofold in Praxis[2]) which is about adapting the practice in concrete action situations, and which is guided by deliberation or phronesis in ethics and politics, to choose correctly and adapt a concrete action to goals and circumstances best possible way and Praxis[1]), which he describes as the practice and development of general competence and insight, which potentially can lead to what we can call Praxis-based Theoria.

Phronesis helps us to consider what steps and means are needed to reach the goals in a specific case. It is about finding a way, procedure or method for the individual case. Our judgment helps us to see and distinguish what is similar and different in situations and assess what kind of goals and values should be realised, and how knowledge should be applied. It is about balancing different considerations and acting in a morally and ethically good way. And where choices must be made that seem reasonable based on the situation one is in. To assess what is generally good and what is good in each case, and ethics and moral judgments will therefore always be the focal point for the assessments made by the professional.

Although the professional must use her judgment, the question of what constitutes good practice is not an individual matter. What are good ways to handle situations are learned within the professional community and are practiced, as the professional gains experience of what works or not. Working to realise these internal values, therefore, does not become an individual project, but something that takes place within socially determined practices. Every practice has its tradition and history, and whoever enters into it must submit to the criteria for what counts as good practice within this practice to be able to develop them further. Different communities of practice that are bound together by something, and that have some characteristics that are more or less stable that make us recognise them. Eikeland describes how the form of activities is emerging "*…through practice and habituation, as habitus, habit, experience, ability, skill and finally 'virtue'- skill or expertise"* (Eikeland, 2018).

Praxis can be understood as the practical synthesis the professional creates in the form of a connection between the theoretical, practical, and moral dimensions. Phronesis then becomes the form of thinking that governs practice, which leads to moral action. Through this, Praxis becomes the basis for articulated Praxis-based Theoria, which we aim to develop when we seek to grasp practitioners living tacit and habituated knowledge, as articulated and justified praxis.

This addresses a need for researchers to enter into a dialogue with others as practitioner colleagues in learning and research, where the ethics of dialogue, is about supporting and acknowledging the deliberative and empowering process towards the human freedom to act, helping each other learn and develop. This brings me further to the question of how such a form of knowledge can be researched and articulated.

## Action Research with and within

If we follow Eikeland's (2009) thoughts, both the creation of the practical syntheses and the validation of knowledge in action will take place within a community of practice. To learn and acquire such a form of knowledge requires participation and belonging to a living community of practice. By learning from how experienced professionals practice and interpret the ap-

plication of the various forms of knowledge, the professional can acquire both the *seeing, saying, doing and relating* of good practice. In this way, within a practice (hopefully) one gradually gets better all the way. Practice is both historically and culturally rooted in the traditions of the subject and includes both the articulated and the silent and more implicit aspects of practice. The different ways of knowing things within a practice are thus hidden both in language and in different ways of doing things, and are embedded in historical, social, institutional, economic, and cultural forms.

The professional habit becomes a form of patterned experience serves as a storehouse of action, which has an impact on how those who enter into this practice will face future situations. Habits become unarticulated theories, which can have great power, and need to be examined and validated. For Eikeland (2015), such a validation of practice takes place within the community of practice, when experienced professionals self-reflexively, critically, and dialogically analyse the structures of experience embedded in the patterns that lie in their way of doing things.

If the goal is to develop Praxis-based Theoria there is a need for me as a researcher to enter into collaborative learning processes, developing knowledge with my collaborative partners and within practice. Building on Wittgenstein's philosophy, John Shotter (2001, 2005) gives us a deeper understanding of the concept of within. He appeals to the "…need to re-discover, from within our ordinary, daily, spontaneous activities, in which we talk of 'seeing' and 'speaking, some of the rich, living, responsively related activities, from out of which such functions – as we now perceive and talk of them as being – have emerged" (Shotter, 2001, p. 345). It is about 'participative thinking', as 'seeing the face', 'hearing the voice' and grasping the 'social poetics' of the social situation (ibid).

In such dialogues the practitioners become co-researchers and the researchers becomes co-practitioners, together involved in co-creating an "action-guiding sense" (Shotter, 2005). In line with this, I position myself as researcher as an organisational change agent, contributing to the collaborative process by facilitating dialogue and emphasising learning and problem solving processes, contributing to the promotion of different voices and perspectives, and to temporally verbalisation of living knowledge (ibid; Halås, 2021).

Eikeland has helped me understand what kind of knowledge, and how learning dialogues between equals are in line with such an approach. He also shows how the dialogues must engage in adapting the practice in concrete action situations, but he does not give me a clear answer on a more concrete methodological level to how to approach this in a way that helps me to both address and handle some of the tensions in such collaboration from within. Then what kind of theoretical perspectives and concepts can support "with" and "within" – dialogues, participative thinking and processes of democratic subjectivity towards Praxis-based Theoria? And what kind of language can help the researcher to engage in the practitioner's natural attitude, seeing the face and hearing the voice of social situations?

## Meløe's praxeology as theoretical framework

When I, as an experienced practitioner, was introduced to the philosophy of Jakob Meløe, it felt like entering a room of recognition, where practitioners were not only allowed, but also

encouraged, to use their everyday language to name their world. It was a kind of both existential and empowering feeling. In a new paper I present a syntheses of Meløe's ideas (Halås, in press 2022). In this paper, I build further on these explorations[2]. Meløe himself called his thoughts as a Praxeology, where the first part of the word, refers to praxis, as we have seen is connected to the idea of "doing/ action". The second part refers both to "word/ language" in combination with "logic", giving associations of how something seems reasonable. A praxeology then becomes a theory of practice, a unity of ideas that offers a way to see and understand both the coherence, patterns and logic of a practice.

Meløe's explorations rest on Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life, Heidegger's concept of a world, and Marx's concept of a mode of production (Meløe, 1997a). For Meløe, the relations between the world and concepts are central. Building on Wittgenstein's idea of the language game, he wants to show how our words are tightened up with our practical activities. By referring to Wittgenstein he replaces ideas of building theoretical foundations with the concept of an activity/ practice/ form of life, and he replaces the concept of "resting on'"with the concept of "*being situated within"* (ibid).

Further he builds on Heidegger's concept of the world, which implicates accepting that the agent is already situated in a world together with her surroundings. When you have completed a description of a thing, you will have described a great deal of the forms of life or the world; When we point at something, we point from *within* that world at something in that world. There is an implication from that to what is the proper language in which to speak about that world: it is the language that is spoken within that world. In that language, there are no descriptions of a man or a woman at work which are not ripe with implications about the world within which that man or woman is working. To understand such a description is to understand that world (ibid). The heritage of Marx lays in the recognition that "…the life of work, the working life of men and women, is at the kernel of any form of life. There is where a description of a form of life should begin" (ibid, p. 442). Meløe rests his philosophy on all of these three, as he finds that all three concepts will become richer by being understood in the light of each other.

He claims that understanding a word is not a question of describing meanings of the world, but about knowing the meaning of a word. With this, he means that a word refers to the practice and that this practice happens within a world. The idea is that the properties of an object appear to us through our work with it, where what appears to us means that we receive concepts for it, concepts to look at, concepts to act on and concepts to work and think with. He claims that we do not have a better understanding of what is said, not by the word nor its meanings, than our comprehension of the interrelated practical activities, and that we cannot understand a remark without understanding the explanation that it gives:

> Understanding explanations is no part of what I learn when I learn to speak. But in learning about the affairs of the world I also learn to explain and to understand the explanations that others give, as much of it, that is, as I have learned about the affairs of the world. (Meløe, 2005, p. 114)

Meløe has especially been occupied with studying both fishermen's and Sami practices in Northern Norway. His concern is about our ability to see what is in a situation, and the connections between our concepts of the world and the world and the connections between seeing, understanding, and doing. He shows how our ability to see and understand what is happening in a specific practice is developed through doing, and how we learn to do by doing,

2 The presentation of Meløe's praxeology, rests greatly on this paper.

and think about what we have done (Meløe, 2017). Furthermore, he shows how conceptual communities rest on a practical understanding of what is happening within a practice community. Meløe (1979a; 1989) makes our ability to see and to understand a matter of knowledge. We have a *skilled eye* when we see what is to be seen: "I see what is to see when I see the affair with the concepts that are built into the affair itself" (Meløe 1979a, p. 23, my translation). On the other hand, there at two ways of not seeing what there is to see: Firstly, I have an *incompetent eye* when I cannot see what is to be seen, because I am not experienced enough and lack the concepts or techniques, etc., that are built into the affair I consider, and I know it (Meløe 1979a). Secondly, I am unable to see at all, when I am blind or have a *dead eye*, where I am not conscious that I do not see what is embedded in the affair.

When we are observing, we should strive at seeing what there is to see (Meløe, 1989), to be able to grasp the action as well- defined, from the agent's point of view. And to grasp this, we need to dwell with the agent's actions before we engage in the agent's understandings.

Meløe shows a practical approach to the basic phenomenal recognition, as he states that the same object takes a different shape depending on where you see it from. Being able to put yourself in someone else's place (or arrangement) is necessary to understand what others are doing and saying (Meløe 1979b). We cannot understand people if we do not understand their world: "Without a sense of the world, you also have no sense of people" (1979c, p. 48, my translation). If we don't understand what the agent is doing, do not direct your gaze (only) towards the agents. Gauge the place the agent sees from and direct your gaze to what the agent is pointing his sights towards (ibid). This way; To the understanding of a remark, there belongs both an understanding of the situation in which it is made, the occasion for its making, etc., and an understanding of that which the remark is about (Meløe, 2005).

Meløe (1973; 1983b) asks us to examine what seems constituent to the practice. Here he aims to identify the smallest possible cut of our world that is necessarily part of a practical operation, in which his operations are intelligible where the intelligible refers to what information is needed to understand the meaning of an action. In the description, we must seek to bring out all that it takes to give the action meaning and to understand the action in the situation. In short, this is about bringing out *the action* (what is done), *intentions* (what is sensed/sensed intellectually and bodily, felt and imagined), and *the context* (what is around, and that forms the framework for it, such as people, things, place, all the things that need to be included to give meaning and identity to an action).

## Methodological implications

Meløe's perspectives has informed my collaborative research ontological, epistemological and methodological. Occupied with questions related to the act of "seeing the face" and "hearing the voice" of practice, working with language, action, and meaning-making, recognising that practices are woven into our situated cultural-historical background, the road to ethnography is short. Where the ethnographer Geertz (1993) talks about "thick descriptions", Meløe refers to how actions are thickly situated, as satiated within a particular situation, using concepts like the agent's "invisible terrain" or tautological landscape. How could Meløe's perspectives be approached methodologically?

Himself describes his method as follows: "Situate yourself within the practice that this object belongs to, and then investigate the object and its contribution to that practice" (Meløe, 1992, p 131). His way of writing shed further light on his method: He normally starts describing a concrete situation, where he slowly and with great detail invites us into action, framed by some form of practice. Here we can find the repetitive movement between narrative and reflection, in which he tests reasoning and tries different ways to describe and understand the meaning of the agent's actions in an affair. He alternates between the investigative narrative and the constant new questions that drive him forward in his investigations. Addressing the "doings", asking "show me, or tell me, what you do", I found that narratives could serve as a common meeting point for the various actors in the collaboration. This way practice narratives became the starting point for our concrete and critical reflection/ analysis in our collaborative research.

Altogether, Meløe gave us questions I brought in to our learning community, to explore practice from within. This were questions like: Who is the agent?, What does the agent do?, What kind of situation is this?, Where is the agent situated?, Where is she placed?, Where am I placed?, What kind of landscape does give an operation its identity?, What kind of subjects, objects, and tools are included and make the action possible?, and What is the necessary knowledge the agent must have to operate? Overall, the various parts constitute the tautology of the action, and helped us systematically explore the relations between the different aspects.

## Meløe's contribution to DPAR

In my Ph.d project I experienced that the participants, both the professionals and the adolescents, gradually became more active in the dialogues. After some time, they also challenged my viewpoints. For example one of the participants claimed that I took part in the repression of them, when, for research ethics reasons, I wanted to omit their full names in the report. They also took active part in dialogues with external stakeholders. Here they did not only address the need for more inclusive practices in the local community, but also, based on their learning from our dialogues, were able to both argue why this was needed and to describe what such inclusive practice could look like (Halås, 2012; 2021). Based on the dialogues, the participants had not only been able to describe and justify what we understood as good practice. They had also gained faith in their own capacity, and willingness to take the initiative to create better conditions for themselves and others. I understand this as examples of deliberated action, in line with Arendt's idea of democratic subjectivity. And for me Meløe's ideas played an active part. What role did he play, and what could then be his contribution to DPAR?

I find that Meløe's praxeology is adaptable and thickens Eikeland's ideas of Action Research from within, both at a theoretical and at a practical/ methodological level. First Meløe gives us a scientific theoretical foundation, concepts and questions for exploring the agent's practical knowledge and collective phronesis, that help us to explore practice to understand what people do, at its own premises, in its own language. He shows us how practice cultures are woven into what we see, and how we interpret and understand what we see. He gives us concepts to see and think with and ask critical questions about the place we

look from, helping us become aware of how different backgrounds of experience give us different prerequisites for understanding, collaboration and create challenges in the collaboration. And, in this way create space for Bakhtin's polyphonic dialogues. In the description, we must seek to bring out all that it takes to give the action meaning and to understand the action in the situation. In short, this is about bringing out the action, intentions, and the context. If we want to understand the meaning of people's different concepts about the world, we need to understand the activities and the world in which their concepts are rooted in. He shows us why it is important not just to listen to what the agent says about her affair. We also have to follow what she does, and her intentions doing so. He helps us to investigate practice as an intelligible practice. He helps to hold back, to ask again and again until we have a meaningful description of the action, accepting there could be different viewpoints in play. He recognizes practitioners' lived practical knowledge, and encourages the use of everyday language. This can be helpful, as it often is a temptation to start explaining the agent's perspectives. Further he invites to explore intentions embedded in practice, striving to articulate the idea of good praxis, embedded in the act of praxis. It helps us to fulfil the first level of validation, as getting a trustworthy description as the foundation for further explorations.

Could such an approach be helpful, addressing and handling the earlier mentioned tensions related to language, the goal of exploration, power, and habituated expectations? Concretely, he offered questions that helped us to become aware of our different viewpoints, showing that although we use the same language, and seem to understand each other, a common word like "home" can mean quite different things. He showed me how both my and my partner's understanding of concepts rested on our experiences, and how this experience was gained within a context, within a world.

I find that Meløe's way of examining the agent in her world has the potential to illuminate and handle the power dynamics between practitioners and researchers, and to become aware of the dynamics between micropolitics and macropolitics, especially how the ghost of evidence colonises the actors lives at different levels. As Meløe encourages and offers questions, helping us to be critically aware of what experiences we see with and the position we understand from, I find that the practitioner's, researcher's, and society's view of the situation is both made aware of and may be challenged.

In sum, I find Meløe's praxeology fits as a frame for dialogues exploring praxis-based Theoria from *within*, aimed at exploring connections between the seeings, sayings, doings and relatings in knowledgeable doing, balancing both knowledge as being and becoming, as well as subjective and collective. Secondly, I find that his framework makes visible tensions in the collaboration, and could be used in a way that leads to praxis-oriented deliberative and empowering learning processes in line with Arends idea of democratic subjectivity. Leading to action in form of living knowledge that strengthen the different subjects capacity to both participate in the dialogues and to exercise human freedom; to both make and be the changes and to create new beginnings. This way I find that his perspectives also could be a suitable frame for doing research *with.*

## Revisiting tensions: a critical perspective

A critical question to Meløe's approach is whether the field of practice has the ability and capacity to transcend or renew its practice. Does DPAR aim to address conflicts or tensions between positions, blind spots, or gaps? Or could this kind of close partnership, create bonding relations, making critical positions difficult? In our research, I experienced that my collaborative partners did not want me to write about a sensitive topic (Halås, 2012), a wish I had to respect after collaborative reflection. Could this form of reflection be merely conservative, mediating and helping to maintain an existing practice? Steen Wackerhausen (2008) is focusing on the danger that an experience-oriented reflection can help to strengthen or maintain habits. He claims that the professions have blind spots, which puts them at risk of maintaining and repeating habitual practice, rather than renewing it. Based on Eikeland's interpretation of Aristotle, the knowledgeable practitioners, through collaborative value-based reflection, will be able to create new connections in their practice, and thus transcend the existing repertoire of action. The action choices are and cannot be determined but can only be sketched and therefore continuously concretised again in new situations. Furthermore, they have a touch of uncertainty about them. We can never know if what we are doing is right. But it is through the openness, dialogue, and reflection between the various affected parties that the good solutions and answers lie. This way, practicing dialogues, exploring practice between equals from within, has not only the potential to articulate the premises for change, with a need to implement subsequently, but has a potential to become the new knowledge, as it speaks.

Another point, made by Meløe, is that the dedicated exploration of the agent's actions and the world could represent a critical perspective in its selves. The site of many of Meløe's explorations is done in practices that in today's society are colonized by the modern society's forms of knowledge and values. Meløe describes the problem with this: "Only those ways of looking at the world that is public to some community are valid, and they are valid only where they are public because only then do they let a world be seen. Where my way of looking at the world is not valid, there I am a stranger." (Meløe, 1983). This means that a validated temporary description of practice from within, potentially has the power to challenge inappropriate explanations from above.

Summing up: In this paper, I have been concerned with offering concepts and a theoretical framework that is particularly suitable for supporting DPAR. I have argued for that this is something that requires special attention to tensions and power dynamics. I find that Meløe's praxeology offers a framework that makes this visible, and supports processes of doing research with and within, making DPAR to an epistemic living practice. Final it supports dialogical deliberative learning processes of democratic subjectivity, acknowledging knowledge as an open-ended question of becoming, mere than a fixed being, and praxis as form of relational and ethical knowing, empowering the subjects to engage and in the never ending process of change, making the world a better place.

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# 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 Inuktut, 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-1980 s, 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 Inuktut.

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 Inuktut 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 Inuktut. 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

to mark out a new space in the city from which Inuit could speak to and about what mattered to them.

To situate myself, I am a socio-cultural anthropologist at Concordia University in Montreal. With Alasie, Evan and other Inuit colleagues as well as, in later years, urban Inuit organisations in Montreal and Ottawa, I have served various roles on the project from co-researcher to co-director. I am currently the principal investigator on Canadian federal government funding that helps sustain the *Nipivut* show and another Inuit radio show the team has helped establish in Ottawa.[2]

Community radio shows are valorised as the building of socially inclusive infrastructures that allow marginalised communities to obtain ownership over their own development through communication (e. g. Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada 2002, Pavarala 2003). Lopez Franco et al vividly describe community radio as a vehicle of self-empowerment, allowing community-driven broadcasters to enact the rights "of those most marginalised…not only to speak but to be taken into account" (2020:179). I do not contest but fully support the political potential of community radio to amplify people's voices. At the same time, however, what I have learned from the Nipivut project is that preoccupations with transformative change cannot deflect attention away from what is actually at stake in "having a voice".

## "Back to the Rough Ground!"

In this paper, I want to look again at the radical picture of PAR, by returning its practice back to the context of everyday life. Simply put, my claim is that the capacity of PAR to effect transformative change is not the heroic picture of autonomous actors freely speaking for themselves and then charting a rational escape from everyday problems. When practitioners talk about PAR what they commonly evoke is the central, alluring image of people as free and autonomous individuals who, in spite of their marginalised status, are able to decide to participate and to make decisions over what to do in order to change a problem situation (Kielty 2019:25). On this basis, participation is understood as a rational and voluntary act, and an expression of individual autonomy in service of a collective that hinges on the capacity to erase perplexity and confusion and privilege agreement over disagreement (Kielty 2019:14). It is not so much that this picture of rational deliberation is wrong as it is misleading. It serves to reproduce a mostly unproblematic image of action as autonomous self-assertion that ultimately conceals much more than it reveals about ordinary life.

In contrast, the radical nature of PAR is, I suggest, the pull it exerts on people to return to the "rough ground" of everyday life, that is to say our shared life in language. In this picture, participatory-action is not reducible to the actions of self-contained, rational agents. Instead, PAR is a living process, indivisible from how it is woven into the circumstances in which it takes place and in the interactions, both linguistic and social, that occur between people. Such complexity does not weaken or diminish the project of participatory action. Instead, it reminds us of its *human* basis. As John Shotter puts it, if we slow down and actually look around at

2 Since 2015, the Nipivut project has been funded in part by two grants from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (an Insight grant [435–2013–1794] and a Partnership Development Grant [890–2017–0033]). My reflections on this project mostly derive from my involvement in its day-to-day workings between 2015 and 2017.

what is *ordinarily* happening in front of us in any participatory project, it is not "action" we see but "joint action," the whirl of social life, as "people's activities become spontaneously and responsively intertwined or entangled with those around them" (2008:37). This is the inevitable ground from which encounters happen, events arise, and transformation occurs (Dumm 1999:21).

Yet, as Wittgenstein (1957) and other thinkers (Cavell 1979) concerned by ordinary language remind us, this ground is not smooth but rough. Anchored in the "rough ground" of our uses and practices of language, the possibility of our journeying together across the terrain of everyday life, (an apt metaphor for the project of PAR), rests, precariously and without any guarantee, on *the extent to which individuals, in speaking for themselves, can speak for others* (Hammer 2002:120–122; also see Shotter 2008:160–164). In ordinary life, this cannot be taken for granted. To speak, to "have a voice" is to speak for oneself but, ordinarily speaking, it is also to "risk both being rebuffed and having to rebuff others" (Hammer 2002:179). "Nothing guarantees that my speaking to you about what matters to me … will be met by your understanding (or caring to understand)" (Gordon 2020:39). Indeed, in the "rough ground" of everyday life, nothing and no one else assures the practices, traditions or agreements of any community (of speakers) other than the individuals concerned and their "willingness to take an interest in others and themselves" (Hammer 2002:119).

This is a radically different picture of language, but its significance could not be more ordinary. By highlighting the instability of our life in language, Action Research, for example, becomes less about the guarantees of consensus offered by models of agreement through scrutinous rational deliberation than about the ordinary and realistic *hopes* people have of finding ways of "going on" together in the effort, the *struggle,* to co-ordinate activities and change their social environments in ways that everyone involved can (hopefully) acknowledge and recognise themselves in. As I hope to demonstrate, careful attention to this fact changes the terms in which we understand the rationality of PAR's claim to effect meaningful change.

## Structure

I divide this paper into four parts. First, I fill in the broader history of the Nipivut project, highlighting the context of how it came about, what changes it sought to effect and some of its achievements. In the following section, what I suggest was at stake in Reggie's interview that morning was the project's claim to navigate the variable depth of community relations. For Alasie, the use of "nipivut" in Inuktut did not refer to voice as an uncontestable or freely given activity. Instead, *Our* Voice signified a quality of gentleness and response, that Alasie embodied. In supporting community members from all walks of life to "find their voice", Alasie was situating action in an ordinary ethics of care. For community members to become radio-makers and therefore initiates of this practice was a social achievement, but it was also precarious and uncertain because it was also a fragile and vulnerable act of self-disclosure. I discuss the difficulties this presented for evaluating the project's enactment of "change" and

how it challenged me to think of participation differently, less a matter of autonomous, self-assertion than a self-regarding question: can I bear to make myself known?[3]

In the third part, I discuss how the ethical demands of this way of conceptualising PAR changed my understanding of participation from a moral good to a material-social exchange of labour (Horner 2002). Creating the time and space for people to participate became as important as the work itself. I provide examples of how the project addressed this issue and the implications it had.

In the concluding section, I re-assess the value of this project for PAR. I point out how this turn to "ordinary realism" in understanding what was at stake in the Nipivut project is not as radically different as it may first appear, but actually an expanded response to a more common place reading of PAR. As such, I hope this intervention can inspire readers to reflect on, and respond differently to, the issues at stake for those involved in their own projects.

## *Nipivut* (Our Voice): Marking out a space for Inuit to speak

For the Montreal Inuit community members I was talking to around the time we got *Nipivut* up and running, the formation of an Inuit radio show in the city was a moment of collective pride. As someone close to the project told me, it showed them that "anything is possible." Radio has an important history for Inuit in communities across the Canadian Arctic (see Northern Quebec Inuit Association 1974).[4] Although the idea for an Inuit radio show in Montreal had been around for as long as anyone involved with the project could remember,[5] Evan, the Inuk producer above , and I knew, (because we had read the report), that Inuit representatives from Montreal had first publicly voiced the idea of a radio show at a national consultation on urban Inuit policy initiatives in the early 2000s (Tungasuvvingat Inuit 2005).

Committed to seeing if we could realise this community identified need, in early 2015 Evan and I conducted an initial needs assessment with Montreal Inuit. Most community members we reached out to returned, in one way or another, to the idea of a show as a *caring* response to the urban Inuit situation. Today, statistics show that up to one third of Inuit live outside of the four Inuit land claims regions across the Arctic and in or around southern Canadian cities. Inuit are known to experience important health and socio-economic disparities compared to non-Inuit in Canada, and these are often amplified in cities. The testimonies of prominent Inuit community members at the federal government's One Voice symposium on urban Inuit in 2005 indicated how social isolation, poverty, and overt discrimination have shaped the experiences of a significant number of Inuit in cities across the country (Tungasuvvingat Inuit 2005).

In terms of demographics, Montreal is the second largest (if unofficial) community of Inuit in Quebec when compared to the 14 official Inuit municipalities located in the northern Nunavik land claims region. Yet there is no one story of being Inuit in the city. Over the years, the population has increased as Inuit have moved to Montreal to find employment, access

3 I take this question from Veena Das' interpretation of the work of Stanley Cavell (see Das 2020:17).

4 The story of how Inuit quickly appropriated the use of radio technologies introduced to northern communities by government and military officials in the 1950s overlaps in important ways with the story of Inuit efforts to get out from under settler-colonial rule and speak for themselves as a self-determining people, in their own language.

5 This meant the idea of a radio show had been circulating in Montreal since at least the early to mid-1980s when Inuit started to appear in the city in increasing numbers.

quality health care, or gain educational opportunities unavailable in the north. Some have sought to escape the lack of safe and adequate housing or other difficult personal or social circumstances in home communities (rooted in histories of colonialism); others have been forced to relocate because of the justice system. Some are visiting family members or passing through, or have chosen to move south just because they could. Moreover, there are now second and third generations of Inuit who only know life in cities, having been born and brought up in the south.

Yet, in spite of the clear diversity of urban Inuit experiences (see Watson et al 2021; cf. Watson 2014:27–44), public perceptions of Inuit in Montreal commonly fall back on troubled stereotypes of itinerancy and poverty based on visible situations of Inuit homelessness. Although Inuit account for only 10% of the Indigenous population in Montreal, they make up 40% of the Indigenous homeless population in the city (Kishigami 2015).[6] While Inuit organisations consistently draw systemic linkages between the current homelessness crisis in the city and the intergenerational impacts of colonial rule affecting Inuit across the Arctic (see Makivik Corporation 2014), over the years the city's media has done little but reinforce the image of Inuit in Montreal as a people "out of place".

In recent decades, violent attacks against Inuit have been on the rise. This negative messaging reached a critical juncture in 2010. This was when the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services was forced to rescind their application to build an Inuit out-patient facility in a northern Montreal borough due to the anonymous discriminatory campaign of a local resident group who publicly opposed the project by characterising Inuit in circulated flyers as a "social problem" and a "dangerous" and "at risk" population who would bring prostitution, drug use, crime and homelessness into the area (Watson 2017:197). The fact that the borough mayor at the time failed to distance themselves from this messaging was not lost on anyone.

## Getting to Air

Upon completion of the needs assessment, Evan and I turned to establishing a PAR framework. By building on a network of community contacts, we formed an ad-hoc working group of Inuit and non-Inuit community representatives and, with the support of the radio staff at CKUT90.3FM who had, by chance, an open slot dedicated to Indigenous language programming, we put a call out on Facebook for a radio team, including the host of a prospective show. Alasie replied immediately. Without question, Alasie, as a central community figure, was pivotal for what was to follow. In spite of everyone's busy schedules, the initial core team took radio production workshops provided by CKUT.

By early summer (2015), we had crafted a joint proposal for an Indigenous language programme identifying four main aims: promote the use (and learning) of Inuktut in the city; connect Inuit in northern communities with those in southern cities; provide Inuit with paid employment and transferrable skills based on media production training; and restorying the negative images of Inuit circulating in the public sphere. Although team members were spread

6 The issue of homelessness is explored with stark emotion by the Inuit documentarian Jobie Weetaluktuk in his 2005 film *Qallunajatut* ("Urban Inuk")

across the city, we figured out a way of working together. Later, Evan would tell me how he saw this as epitomising the Inuit ethic of *Piliriqatigiingniq* (working together for a common purpose). On October 6, 2015, roughly six months after we first pitched the idea, *Nipivut* was on air.

As a PAR project, the show reflected a claim to an (urban) Inuit community that the radio team, gathered around Alasie, was making and for which, in the production of the show, they were taking responsibility for. The responsibility for the radio content, mostly interviews, rested with Alasie (and later other co-hosts), a producer and a small and often changing collective of Inuit individuals. *Nipivut* constituted an ethical and political appeal to recognise Inuit as belonging in the city and the constitution of a collective (Inuit) Voice as reflective of the differences within the Inuit community.

In the early months after its first broadcast, the show gained unanticipated momentum. Alasie, Evan and other team members were invited on to morning TV shows and gave in-depth interviews to several Montreal newspapers. Behind the scenes, I was working hard to mobilise the resources of the show and partnered with an Inuit employment centre in the city to provide several vulnerable individuals with paid job opportunities and transferable skills training. In terms of content, alongside a live Christmas show that had Inuit connecting with others in cities across the country for the first time, a standout event that received positive media attention was Alasie's anchoring of an hour long outside broadcast one freezing cold February night with homeless Inuit as part of a national homelessness radio marathon. Broadcast solely in Inuktut, that show was relayed live on campus-community radio stations across southern Canada.

As a result of partnering with a national Inuit media corporation, the *Nipivut* show started to be rebroadcast on local stations in Arctic communities. Within four years, three producers of the show had gone on to secure full-time positions at major Inuit organisations. In 2017, the National Association of Campus and Community Radio Stations awarded *Nipivut* the Best in National Indigenous Broadcasting honour at its annual ceremony.

## The Ethics of Voice: radio-work as an ordinary ethics of care

Reggie's testimony on *Nipivut* that morning was not, I contend, simply an example of "giving voice" to a marginalised individual that the APTN news report had initially and enthusiastically characterised it to be. Instead, it highlighted what was at stake in "having a voice".

In PAR, "voice" is commonly characterised as the individual right to express privately held ideas and opinions. Richard Winter talks about individuals "finding their voice" as the foundation for "thinking in dialogue with others" that makes possible the self-transformation of one's cultural setting (1998:67). This connection between voice and social change reaches back to the pivotal work of Paulo Freire and descriptions of action as primarily deriving from the recovery of people's ordinary voices: the task of allowing the "oppressed" to "find the words" to describe their own reality and overcome the "culture of silence" they have been subjected to (McKenna 2013).

When I first watched the APTN evening news story, I admit to having felt emboldened to speak *about* Reggie's voice as a kind of exemplary object of participatory research that I could

point at. Thinking back, perhaps I sought to emulate the "victory narratives" of Action Research (Owen et al. 2005) I was coming across in my reading at the time that seemingly had no problem in talking about "voice" as an uncontestable action – as a separate, "dead form", as Shotter might put it (2008:183), that anyone, provided the opportunity, could pick up and use like a tool from a toolbox.

Yet, as Toril Moi reminds us, action is not an object; having "neither depths nor surfaces" action is not a box we can lift a lid on to look at what is inside (Moi 2017:180). If we assume we could talk of actions objectively as separate from "us", their doers, then the ordinary world would be nothing more than a system of separately existing parts where what happens could be simply explained away by the language game of causes and effects and autonomous agents (Shotter 2008:180, Moi 2017:180). We do not live separate from the world. For Wittgenstein and other philosophers of ordinary language, to equate ordinary people's "voices" with perspicuity or clarity of expression is potentially not only naïve but dogmatic *if* it deflects attention away from what is at stake for people as they use language to traverse the ambiguous, textured and often challenging terrain of their ordinary worlds. Whatever we call "action", it is not an object we can point at, but an interpersonal matter that rests on, and continually returns us to, self-other relations.

## The textures of voice

With Reggie, that morning, Alasie was not sitting down to record his "voice", as though the overarching aim was to add another audio interview to a shelf or digital file marked "archive". *Our* Voice signified a quality, that Alasie embodied; a quality of gentleness and response, what Sandra Laugier evocatively terms an "ordinary ethics of care" (Laugier 2020:13). As Laugier explains:

> "*Care* proposes bringing ethics back to the level of the "rough ground of the ordinary" … the level of everyday life. It is a practical response to specific needs, which are always those of singular others (whether close to us or not), of the "everyday life of the other;" it is work carried out just as much in the private sphere as in public; it [is] a commitment not to treat anyone as insignificant, and it is a sensibility to the details that matter in lived situations." (original italics; 2020:25)

*Nipivut* was an ethics of care in this sense. The show was an expression of (moral) learning based on Alasie's lifelong commitment, as a social worker, to paying attention to the textured realities and circumstances of other people's lives. For Alasie, who was adamant the show should promote the use of Inuktut, this notion of care was indivisible from the use of language. Attention to personal expression was a means of showing, and therefore caring for, people's moral vision, their way of dealing with the world (original italics; Laugier 2020:11).

This was the project's principal claim to action as "joint action" or what we might call, following John Shotter's lead, a relationally-responsive practice (2008:160–161). It was the pull of inquiry by Alasie into the *depth* of ordinary agreement between herself and her guests; "depth" here meaning, the extent to which, in finding their voices, individuals were allowing others to make sense of them (of who they are, how they carry themselves, what they stand for) (cf. Hammer 122–123). By paying attention to what counts, what is at stake for Inuit in their everyday, the project provided trainee radio-makers, mostly Inuit youth, with "an ap-

prenticeship of attention to the expression of others" (Laugier 2020:13). In this, team members were learning, as they were arranging, conducting and editing interviews, how to respond and be responsive to others based on a new sensibility for meaning (cf. Laugier 2020:13).

They were learning a key turn in PAR that the project was promoting: that is, what matters is not so much knowing, or the failure to know, than acknowledging and accepting (or accommodating or refusing) others' positions and commitments, and taking (or evading) responsibility for what it is we say about the world, about others, about how things might be. One cannot underestimate the challenge this presented, as I will return to below.

The achievement of *Nipivut* that morning was making public this commitment to an ordinary ethics of care for all Inuit. As such, Reggie's account of life told in Inuktut was not a retelling of facts but, with Alasie's mediation, an act of self-disclosure, an appeal to community. His story was, in the context of this action project, a moral expression of Alasie's staunch position she was taking responsibility for: that Inuit are Inuit and, regardless of wherever they may be or whatever situation they find themselves, they have the right to be heard and should have access to the same kinds of basic material support as Inuit in other parts of the country.

The locus of action then was not on Reggie's voice. The responsibility for "Our Voice" rested on the response of listeners. This was inherently risky and was traversing the variable depth of community relations. In contrast to the idea of voice as having an uncontestable value, there was no guarantee that people would recognise Reggie as a representative speaker, by which I mean that, in speaking for *himself*, listeners would recognise Reggie as speaking *for* them. In response to Reggie's story, people were being asked to reflect on and position themselves. So, when Reggie spoke of his love for family (his mother had also lived with him on the streets) and his struggles over the years with substance use, he was asking people to respond to the implicit question that, through his tears, he was asking himself: who am *I* in relation to *us?* It was unsettling, but in Alasie's sensibility for the situation, the ability to improvise and move on when faced with certain reactions (Laugier 2020:13), she exemplified how to "go on" with care and compassion with Reggie as he chose to tell his story. That is what made their encounter over the radio that morning so poignant and so moving and that is what I struggled with, at the time, to find the appropriate words to describe.

## Can I bear to make myself known? The difficulties of evaluating "change"

For all of its success, the sustainability of the show remained vulnerable to a high turnover of participants. For some individuals with varying attachments and past experiences of community, the stakes of participating and becoming involved were often difficult to navigate. In one way or another, whether people chose to continue on with the show or not, the nature of the work consistently returned participants to the same self-regarding question: can I bear to make myself known?

To reiterate, the use of the first person plural in Nipivut, "*Our* Voice", did not reflect a pre-existing community in the world. Throughout but particularly in its early years, the authority for the project's existence rested squarely on the authority Alasie carried within community. Alasie led the way. In doing so, she demonstrated to others, by example, what was at stake for

the project. The project's use of PAR was very much a means of orienting participants within the idea of "finding a voice", helping them to "find their way around" what was at stake for themselves and others. For all of its other achievements, the participatory intent of *Nipivut* returned in the production of each show to the experiences of individual team members and to the value of bringing "talk [about "voice"] back into a living connection with the circumstances that gave it its life in the first place" (Shotter 2008:202): – that is, again, the question Reggie was posing himself, who am *I* in relation to us?

In general, I agree with the position that, before it can be anything else, Action Research is not an epistemological endeavour but a pedagogical-based practice "directed at practitioner growth rather than at understanding reality at all costs" (Villecanos de Castro & Banegas 2020; also see Watson 2019). However, this obviously makes it challenging to evaluate the impacts of a project. By action, the *Nipivut* team never pictured its ambition as making way for a solution to community cohesion. Thankfully, the funding I had received for this project did not require a strict demonstration of outcomes. This freedom has allowed me to think more deeply about the *Nipivut* project's adherence to a relationally-responsive model of joint action and individuals' striving for personal integrity.

The concept of personal integrity has helped me qualify my understanding of how trainees on the *Nipivut* team worked with "voice" as a deeply textured activity. Participation in any community-based project can place a heavy burden on the shoulders of participants. Finding one's voice in this context, by which I mean finding out where one stands in relation to others, can help individuals somewhat alleviate, or at least come to better grips with, the pressure of associating one's participation with a form of consent to speak on behalf of others (Horner 2002). The team was alert to this fact and to the expectations that participation placed on individuals, that is, of being ready to be challenged by others' opinions and experiences while remaining open to self-transformation. As I will come to describe in more detail below, the project consciously chose to avoid conflating participation with a voluntary and moral commitment to "community" by making clear that it was a form of material labour, for which individuals would receive compensation and other benefits.

Nevertheless, the show's elders and producers always returned participants to the space of radio-making as a space of learning and personal development in which Inuit individuals on the team could first experience and, then, hopefully, go on to identify with, the value of paying attention to the expression of others. As I have mentioned already, however, this only made sense because the project rested solely, and precariously, on everyone's willingness and capacity to take an interest in others *and* themselves (Hammer 2002:119). The fact of working in this participatory manner was never easy and this directly contributed to the turnover of participants, but there was no other viable alternative we could find. More often than not the fact of making oneself known through the work was a lot more difficult than some participants expected it be. It also highlighted a key if also implicit tension between conformity (with others' voices) and self-reliance (relying on one's own voice) that individuals on the radio team were faced with working out.

Ethnographically speaking, insight can turn on moments when what is ordinary comes undone, an instance, for example, when someone (suddenly) finds they cannot speak for one another (Cavell 1979:19–20). One participant, for example, who was deeply committed to the project, expressed to me on several occasions how, having come from a different part of the country, the show had offered him an opportunity "to get to know" other Inuit in the city and gain a sense of belonging in community. He spoke of feeling he had "found his voice" through

working closely with other Inuit on the show and felt, over time, that when speaking, others recognised themselves in his words. In this sense, "voice" was empowering, but the textured reality of everyday life became all too evident when he decided to speak out (and, in my opinion, justifiably so) against the representation of Inuit in a new art film release and discovered how, in taking responsibility for what one says, "finding one's voice" can also reveal its ethical and political dimensions. This story is why I find PAR is radical and transformative, not because of its idealism but because of its ordinary realism, its capacity that is to pull its participants back to the struggles of what is at stake in seeking to effect change.

## The Depth of *Nipivut*'s Material Claim to Community

The work of "finding one's voice", especially in the political context of a marginalised community, is neither easy, nor is it to say it ever comes to an end. That is why from the start of the Nipivut project, the team took the decision to distance itself from other models of PAR that regard participation as a voluntary and moral commitment to a collective good. As an anthropologist, I fully agreed with this decision. Assuming that community members would want to be involved, and want to contribute to a collective voice because it was a "good", community-driven project was, I felt, to invoke an idealist ethics that placed the burden of the project's efficacy on the good will and character of community members. If the project were to fail, it would cast aspersions on the moral character of participants. Properly considering the material barriers to participation turned consideration of Voice from a cultural (and philosophical) asset or product or topic into a material-social condition.

Throughout this paper I have referred to participation on the radio show as "work". Participation is a form of labour if we regard it to be "a material practice aimed at altering the physical and social environment" (Horner 2002:570). In the Nipivut project, therefore, we tried, to the best of our ability, to provide (somewhat) adequate financial compensation to all who became involved. We also attempted to address other material concerns and barriers to participation. For many individuals, for example, finding the time to participate was difficult due to a host of other obligations during the week. In some instances, we were able to work with the Inuit employment centre in Montreal and create a programme where *Nipivut* "work" was included in clients' training. We also held discussions with a local college to see if we could integrate radio-work as part of Inuit students' course offerings: this did not succeed in the end, but it led to discussions around similar ideas. We found providing participants with handheld zoom digital recorders allowed them to conduct interviews at any time of day if they wanted to seize an opportunity. One participant talked excitedly about seeing an elder she had not seen in many years in Montreal one day, and because she had a recorder to hand, caught up with her and was able to share her story with people on the radio. Space was also an issue for many people. We had access to space at my university and to studios at the radio station. I know that on more than one occasion, the office space was used as somewhere to spend the night for individuals employed on the show and affected by situations of homelessness.

The implications of this materialist approach to the project were significant, more than I had initially expected, and certainly helped ensure the sustainability for the first six years at least. Considering the personal and existential difficulties of voice I have raised above,

rearticulating voice from a material perspective provided some (but definitely not all) individuals with a sense of social distance from some of the project's ethical demands. The chance at paid employment also helped build individuals' CVs and expanded their list of professional skillsets. On the other hand, the funding of individuals to produce a community radio show invited some quiet feedback that it only served to undermine the voluntary ethos of community radio. While I understood this position, I think the social inequalities Inuit face in the city merited a material-social as opposed to a strictly cultural approach to radio production. One lasting impact of providing financial compensation is the question of future expectations. The team has had to face this yet, but if funding is not available, it will require a rethink of the very premise of the project's participatory ethos.

## Conclusion: PAR and Ordinary Realism

In its enactment of a participatory ethic, PAR compels its practitioners to acknowledge and work *within* the ordinary relationally-responsive, efforts of people to break new ground. Any meaningful inquiry into knowing what is ordinarily said and done, the site of participatory action, must necessarily traverse people's everyday worlds textured in endless and often difficult ways.

Yet movement requires friction. This is why engaging in action-oriented inquiry is often reported to be difficult and "messy" (Cook 2009). Unfortunately, practitioners are often reticent to elaborate on such experiences for fear of discrediting the principles of social justice, empowerment, decolonisation that PAR has come to stand for (Lenette et al 2019:162).[7] My point in this paper is that in learning from Wittgenstein and other thinkers concerned with ordinary language, we gain a genuine sense of how the relation between language and the world is vulnerable and unavoidably so. Practitioners of PAR, a deeply human endeavour, must be responsive and alive to the "uncertainty of [human] relations" (Das 2020:46). It is not the flawless, friction-less ice but the "rough ground" that teaches us what is actually at stake in "the stitching together of action and expression in the work of bringing about a different everyday" (Das 2020:58). Acknowledgement of this reminds us to look again at the formation of our agreements (in participatory work, for example) less as a normal instance of rational, communicative exchange than a moment of reflexive self-interpretation, the terms of which reveal, from my perspective as a participant, whether I recognise myself in the defining activity and in others speaking for me (and me for them) (Cavell 1979:25; also see Norris 2006:13–14).To paraphrase the philosopher, Cora Diamond, this is the "difficulty of reality": the fragility of our agreements and the variable depth of our relationships and the "*we*" upon which they depend, that practitioners of PAR do not, indeed, cannot turn their back on but must work from *within* in their efforts to collaborate and figure out ways of 'going on'.

Although I remain indebted to John Shotter (1980, 2003, 2008) for having brought "ordinary realism" (through Wittgenstein) into Action Research and organisational science[8], I

7 On this point, I would suggest that if one is to speak like Orlando Fals-Borda – a key architect of PAR – of "authentic participation" then it must not take communal agreement for granted but recognize that a genuine community would accommodate, indeed encourage, disputes (Hammer 2002:179).

8 I would also like to draw attention here to Marco Motta's (2019) articulation of "ordinary realism" in anthropology.

do not find what I have attempted to sketch above a distinctly different take on PAR as much as an engaged and expanded response to a more familiar reading of its method. When Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, for example, described Action Research in the introduction to their edited Sage Handbook as not so much a methodology than an "orientation to inquiry," they provided a straightforward yet telling definition: "Action Research primarily *arises*" they wrote "as people *try* to work together to address key problems in their communities or organisation" (my italics; 2008:1). I find this description to be evocative of the shift in PAR practice I have been wanting to articulate in this paper in two important ways.

Firstly, the focus on action as "arising" is particularly meaningful. Immediately, it decentres the origins of action, moving it away from rational agents and the idea of a generic, mobile, instrumental method to be imposed on the world. From my reading, I take this to mean that people's appeal to action is actually more responsive than what is normally understood by its use in research to assert some confident form of doing or acting *on* the world to intentionally change or shape it somehow. Here, as it arises, action already infers a relation, a form of engagement or strategic inquiry that people create together in *response* to specific circumstances and to each other based on what people understand to be happening, or not happening, within a local social context (Somekh 1995:341).

Secondly, and as importantly, Reason and Bradbury tell us that people do *not* work together, rather they "*try* to work together". Action then is not only a response to the world but also an on-going effort or struggle to share and co-ordinate activities. This sets action against the skepticism of human fallibility. Thus, we expect, for how can we not, that in the course of a project mistakes will be made and, one assumes, because language is an artefact of our human condition, excuses to be given (Austin 1957). Hannah Arendt talked of this when talking about the irreversibility of action in terms of "setting things in motion". The fact our actions unfold in endlessly indeterminate and contingent ways are only made bearable, she argued, by two speech acts: promising and forgiving (Arendt 1958). It is the "promise" that establishes trust and dependability in the other upon which social life turns. The act of forgiveness (the fact of mistakes and the giving and acceptance of excuses) reflects the harm that is alive in the world by "allow[ing] a way of going on to new futures" (Beckwith 2011:8).

What I take from Reason and Bradbury's definition is that a finer sensibility for what is at stake in the ordinary, rough ground of our everyday lives is already there within PAR practice. Bringing an ethnographic eye to action, as I hope to have done in this paper, can allow us to look again at what sets PAR apart from other forms of inquiry and, moving forward, provide an ever more robust defence of its transformative potential.

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# 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 minado 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 inmanente 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 inmanente, 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 pregiven 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 17$^{th}$ century, modernity has increasingly monopolised knowledge production

socially to specialised and segregated academic and educational institutions like universities and colleges, or to separate research institutions, all based on clear and principal divisions of labour between researchers as knowers and something or somebody else as researched and known.

Over many decades however, during what could be called late- or post-modernity, knowledge production has become gradually more socially distributed among many societal levels and different kinds of organisations and communities, often encapsuled in the term *the knowledge society* (Gibbons et al, 1994, Nowotny 2001). This development has happened as a real, socio-historical trend, reinforced by a gradual recognition that the specialised and monopolised understanding of expertise dominating modernity and modelled on modern natural science and technology, may never have been sufficient. Different knowledge forms have always been socially distributed, but differently at different times and in different cultures and societies. The challenge remains, however, how to recognise this understanding practically, i. e. in a methodological sense; in how social research is done.

As part of this development, *both* the model of social research as disengaged and externally positioned in a distanced ivory-tower in order to secure both critique and objectivity, *and* the overly didactic, school-based, pre-practical, and hence theoretical models for teaching and learning, have been under attack methodologically, theoretically, and politically for lack of relevance and validity. As a response, many forms of collaborative, applied or engaged research approaches have emerged and continue to do so. action research is part of this movement. Simultaneously, however, there is currently a "post-post-modern" reaction on the rise, accusing collaborative research approaches for having a tendency to relativize science. This reaction is often expressed as a critique positioning collaborative research approaches as unscientific in their mixing of scientific research with normative stances and social-political activism. This is seen for instance in the "science wars" in the USA, and more recently in Denmark, where specific research communities have been pointed out by government politicians for being activist and pseudo-scientific due to their research methods and fields, e. g. gender, racism, migration and Middle East research (Center for Vild Analyse, 2021). Although this attack has not been aimed specifically at action research, the rationale behind it is applicable to action researchers as well (Andersen 2021).

In light of this, our article explores the hypothesis that the vulnerability of action-based research to accusations as old as action research itself, of being unscientific, may well be due, at least partly, to the fact that we as action researchers often try to conform to a *research language* developed within and adjusted to more conventional research paradigms. In spite of decades with cascades of criticism against established conventional social research, there still seems to be a strong, taken-for-granted demand that *ultimately* also human and social phenomena must be described in formats, approaches, and methods developed and cast within dominant models for natural science, technology, and medicine. As we return to below, one reason could be that critiques of positivism have been too clearly categorised as theoretical, while the empirical side of research still operates independently with different forms of "data", and a corresponding, increasingly widespread division between experiential learning on the one hand, and empirical research on the other (Bonss 1982:11). The tendency to see knowledge as a commodity could be part of the reason, as well. The experiential side of knowing is nuanced, ambiguous, contextual, and normative, while a commodity-logic requires standardised, unambiguous, decontextualised, and purportedly neutral ways to encapsulate and convey knowledge (Duus 2008, Eggers 2009).

Divisions like these seem counterproductive to attempts at letting action research find more appropriate expressions and come to its own, however. Conforming to conventional social science language has the consequence that our research practice is experienced as being squeezed into formats that diminish, misrepresent, distort, or even hide what is developed through complex and multifaceted processes of action research. We lack both appropriate concepts and an apt common language to convey the special traits of action research in ways that communicate adequately and nuanced our distinctiveness to ourselves and to both the research and the wider society. To deal with this, we need to explore and discuss changes in the social organisation of research and more broadly, knowledge generation. By social organisation of research we mean the institutionalisation of the relations between researchers and researched, and between formal, non-formal, and informal ways of learning. For our part, this article is our collective and tentative contribution to an emerging, important and necessary discussion.

## 2. Internal challenges in and for action research

As suggested, there are many different versions of action research that all have their ways of conveying learning and knowledge (cf. Eikeland 2012, 2020). Some think of action research as field experiments or quasi-experimental design, others as applied social research, others again as collaborative research, and finally some as practitioner research and immanent critique. The gnoseology-table presented below, illustrates how different forms like these can be sorted according to different relations between "knowers" and "known" among other things. Although action researchers of all sub-categories seem to be concerned with practice in a broad sense, the challenges concerning both social research in general and varied forms within action research as a broad and general designation, are different, depending on what **gnôsis** (knowledge) form is being enacted. (cf. table 1)

First of all, then, we need to show in outline within the article's limits, that our intuition is pointing at something substantial, that there really is something there, which certain core forms of action research is seeking, irreducible to conventional methods. Secondly, our challenge is: *How* do we articulate, and explicate our intuitions about the potentials in action research clearly and critically, and how do we justify the process and its results *as* research and as research based knowledge and competence, without falling back on the divisions we feel should be transcended? To be worth while, whether as supplementary or transformative, the practices of action researchers must contain and bring forth insights which are not already articulated or possible to articulate just as well through conventional research forms and related research terms. Our contention is that something important is missed by attempts to reduce or subordinate action research's diverse and basic forms of knowing to conventional research methods, their affiliated language, and their basic distinctions and separations between "data", methods, and theory. action research is not *merely* a collaborative commitment to change, supported by conventional, applied research. Hence, we need to find answers to questions like *how* to show and justify the added value of action research concerning research validity and relevance, participation, learning, democracy, and similar objectives, which action researchers often claim intuitively for their approach?

## 2.1 Immanent critique

Of course, all kinds of both conventional and action research may have value for different purposes in specific contexts. In this article, however, we argue how and why *immanent critique* carries a great but not fully appreciated potential for addressing, containing, developing, and articulating the intuitions about action research's specific added value, and at the same time for developing a stronger basis for a more appropriate and simultaneously scientifically legitimate action research language. Immanent critique has a long and specific history which we cannot deal with (cf. Stahl 2021). We only point to important traits that concern our current research practice and a language conveying research-based insights and knowledge.

Immanent critique addresses internal insufficiencies and contradictions in all kinds of pretenders to dogmatised and unidimensional ways of knowing, fixed positions in schools of thought, discourse formations or generally in all ways-of-doing-and-thinking-about-things, which are taken subconsciously and uncritically for granted in given communities and societies, both scholarly and quotidian. Immanent critique *questions* and problematizes all such *basic assumptions*, and exposes if and how proclaimed principles and aims remain unfulfilled, often by necessity, by their adherents. Critical ambitions like these concerning basic assumptions are often shared and explicitly espoused by action researchers. Immanent critique often does this by showing how certain ways-of-thinking-and-doing-things are always already, practically and tacitly, present inside and as part of the very activities denying them and trying to exclude them. For instance, when action researchers experience that the insights of an action research project are multidimensional, but present their projects in a unidimensional research language, we see an insufficiency that may be caused by either uncritical approaches to research communication, or by an outside demand requiring conventional research communication formats. This means, of course, that even challenges and insufficiencies within action research need to be addressed critically. Basically, immanent critique is therefore first and foremost a kind of practice already implicitly embedded and at work in normal linguistic practice. The possibility of context-transcending and -sublating critiques like this is always already presupposed in normal language use (Eikeland 1997, 2022). That is why immanent critique is not a separate and competing substantial position, school of thought, theoretical paradigm etc. It is an activity inherent and latent in ordinary use of language, which needs to be made explicit, developed, organised, and perfected.

## 2.2 The "assimilation-relapse" of resorting to conventional language and concepts

To pick up on the challenge, then: Practitioners in many professions experience a political and organisational pressure to justify how their work either builds on research or could be justified as research in itself (Weinberger & Weyringer 2015). The conventional slogan is that professional practice must be research based, i. e. based in knowledge produced by generally recognized research methods. In order for professional practitioners to avoid appearing to most spontaneous and doxic perceptions of research as merely inferior, "pre-scientific", "anecdotal", marginalised "experiential learning" from work and practice, they seem to need to refer their efforts to conventional methods as a legitimising way of articulating professional development and generation of professional knowledge. This is expressed in a language,

which proves findings and assertions by resorting to interviews, questionnaires, unbiased observations, or other conventional methods that are generally acknowledged in a wider societal sense, and by combining extant theories and practice in what some call "practical syntheses" (Grimen 2008).

Similarly, action researchers are *also* often referred, feel compelled, and actually do resort to a spectre of conventional, mostly qualitative or interpretive social research methods, within which a certain approach to knowledge is embedded. Ultimately, both professional practitioners and action researchers, lacking more adequate ways of thinking, seem to conform to "collecting data" by means of some generally established "data-collection method", and to "interpret" their "findings" in light of some extant "general theory", the way research approaches and methods are normally taught in universities. The question is if and how this validates, merely supplements, or in deed obfuscates the "added value" of action research, and of the learning acquired through professional and everyday practice.

In consequence, current action research projects are often embedded in many different research traditions and approaches deriving from both the humanities and social sciences, drawing on different general, scientific paradigms, such as positivism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, pragmatism, social constructionism, etc. as well as different theoretical approaches, such as systems theory, complexity theory, post-structuralism, process philosophy, etc. As critical methodological discussions over decades have shown, however, separated theories and methods like these are themselves saturated with validity challenges. We will not attempt to delve into every such theory and method here. Neither are we suggesting any "whole sale" rejection or acceptance of any theories or methods. Our point is simple. Such theories, paradigms, etc. cannot be uncritically adopted as arbitrarily chosen identities and legitimizing "stances" without critical questioning, discussion, and justification. action research as immanent critique *questions* or *deconstructs* "basic assumptions" everywhere. All mere assumptions must be "picked apart", and remounted critically. Hence, such positioning can hardly be used the way even many action researchers do, as unquestioned, "safe havens" or "last resorts" trying to save their status as research scientifically (or merely rhetorically) through such positioning. The real challenge for action research as immanent critique, however, is not merely to question, criticise, negate, and deconstruct all fixed positions, but to produce something "positive" beyond the splits and divisions mentioned above, as the outcome of the critical deconstruction of basic assumptions.

Since there are no universal panaceas nor safe havens, then, critical exploration and thinking is always necessary from the inside of all practices; the paradigms, positions, divisions, and splits mentioned included. That is how real development happens, not merely by uncritically accepting, shifting, and exchanging models, theories, philosophies, or whatever as unmediated alternatives. But even with a skeptical-phenomenological *epokhê* bracketing all of the above positions, starting anywhere *in medias res* would still presuppose and imply what the Germans call *geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* or *basic historical concepts* (Brunner et al, 1979–2004). Basic historical concepts are not simply the present authors' subjectively preferred last resort and suggested panacea, however. They are what everyone is socialised into as a member of societies and cultures, *before* becoming specialised students and researchers. They are what we have to be able to do, and how, in order to do the things we inadvertently do in our everyday lives. They are what we have been given through our upbringing and culture as tools in order to start at all, to learn specialised methods and theories. Hence, although such historical concepts, theories, and methods are surely existentially unavoidable, they must still

be scrutinised like all others. Since we necessarily exist and practise from the inside of such concepts, they too must be deconstructed and reconstructed from the inside. Basic historical concepts are normally tacitly taken for granted, however. Hence, they are usually not even considered by social researchers. They have histories of development, of construction, establishment, deconstruction, and transformation, however; *Wirkungsgeschichten* of which we all are products. We would like to present such historical concepts as part of a way of thinking, carrying a hitherto mostly neglected potential in social research, and for action research in particular. We cannot examine them thoroughly here, however, for lack of space.

## 2.3 The Trojan horse: Justifying the "added value" of action research for research, development, participation, and change efficiency

To move directly to one major point, then: Programmatically, as a starting point but ultimately as a most secured stance for immanently critical action research, we posit the preposterous thesis to be critically explored but eventually and hopefully defended, that basically, action research is at work as the experience-based and self-reflective method of normal science methodology. The recognised and accepted research methods of conventional social research: observation, questioning, experimenting, are indeed, part of what we have inherited as basic historical concepts and ways-of-doing-things. As already indicated, immanent critique is a kind of practice already implicitly and subconsciously embedded and at work as a crtitical potential in normal linguistic practice. There is no inconsistency, then, in claiming that normal, mainstream methodologists do practitioner-Action-Research, experiential and apprenticeship learning, and immanent critique subconsciously, without self-reflectively knowing and recognising it. It is in fact their experiential method of methodology. This means a certain kind of action research as reflection in and on practice, works as an unavoidable *Trojan horse* inside the high fortress of normal science, inside the discipline of methodology, i. e. inside the discipline ultimately legitimising conventional social research. Practitioner action research, experiential learning, critical self-reflection, recollection, and immanent critique: –ways of doing things, which conventional, modernist research has explicitly been trying to exclude and replace, are all core parts of the methods of social research methodology, even if done subconsciously and lacking in conscious distinctions.

If this can be shown concretely, then, the conceptual walls between conventional empirical research and experiential learning tumble, and so do the attempted conventional and *Popperian* demarcation lines between science and whatever does not qualify. The tumbling walls do not justify or indicate that "anything goes", however, only that there are no sharp and clear either-or demarcation lines. Instead, there are gradual transitions, developments, transformations, and emerging concepts and insights. By making this visible, and thereby liberating the Trojan horse, deconstructing the walls between normal, empirical social science and experiential learning, the problems outlined at the start can be discussed more openly and maybe even solved constructively, i. e. by sharing the until now privileged methods of methodology with all other professions, rather than trying to monopolize them solely for the professional researchers. This is a way of outlining what immanent critique could amount to. It does not merely tear down.

To give a better indication of this, we need a few more examples, however, of how challenges and insufficiencies in conventional research can be submitted to immanent cri-

tique. There are many insufficiencies inherent to conventional social research methods, and as indicated, to much action research as well. Most of the conventional insufficiencies are well known and recognised, at least sub-consciously, and discussed in almost every current textbook in research methodology. For reasons of space, however, we must limit ourselves to three quite general challenges: 1) some difficulties with the concept of "data", 2) the logical challenges with "theory-pluralism", and 3) the challenge of specifying what methods the discipline of social research methodology itself relies on in justifying and legitimising empirical research in its conventional forms. This last form is already outlined above as immanent critique by means of the Trojan horse within the walls, at the core of conventionalism.

The chosen three challenges could all be called theoretical. It is important to emphasise that the challenges confronting action researchers are not merely theoretical, however. The danger of thinking critique to be merely theoretical has already been pointed out. The challenges are also doubly experiential as **a**) problems with the concept of data, and **b**) as tensions and clashes often encountered by action researchers directly concerning research discourses and taken-for-granted-assumptions about knowledge production in different lived situations. For example 1), when writing project proposals for external funding bodies who may operate with basic assumptions about social research as visitor based and based on specific external relations between researchers and researched, knowers and known, 2) during the action research process itself when encountering conventional institutionalised practices, logics, and taken-for-granted assumptions about what research and knowledge is supposed to be in partner organisations, 3) when evaluating "outcomes" or so-called "findings" of action research projects, and 4), when reporting on projects and their "results" to external partners and funding institutions. When engaging in action research projects, we often experience many different interests at stake among the involved partners simultaneously: economic, political, and different knowledge interests. In addition, we sometimes meet similar challenges collegially in our own research environments at the universities, which can be considered as methodological, ideological, and political battle fields. At first glance, challenges seem terminological, but underlying terminological issues lie conceptual and instutional challenges as well.

## Data-trouble

For instance, the term "data" entails ideas about the existence of unprejudiced, theoretically uncontaminated, true, valid, and separate "bits of information" accessible for every unbiased observer, possible to "collect" by means of specific "data-collection" methods (Bonss 1982, Dear 1985, 1995). But "data" are both theory-dependent and theory saturated. They are created and selected from an endless, undifferentiated universe of potential data as either relevant or irrelevant in relation to some specific theory or hypothesis. Data are also culturally and theoretically *saturated.* Different people, cultures, etc., even astronomers and nuclear scientists, perceive whatever they perceive, *as* something in particular, determined by different technical and institutional arrangements, ingrained competences, and *basic historical concepts* in their culture, community, and society. Theories, and more broadly, cultures make certain "data" salient and visible but ignore or hide others. Hence, phenomena for which some cultures or professional communities have concepts and words, may become invisible or at least harder to grasp through cultures which do not.

Hence, *data* are not *given* for just any observer imagined to be positioned unprejudiced, unbiased, and without Baconian idols, outside whatever is observed. Their relevance as "data" is necessarily decided by whatever theoretical, cultural etc. prejudices determine both their "what" and relevance. Sociologists ignore the positions of planets and stars, for example. Using the term "data" therefore, activates a line of reasoning derived from theoretically clarified, natural and technical science. The term operates under a logic in which culturally made, i. e. artificial constants in the world can be extracted, used, and studied as isolated observational bits of information or "snapshots", maintained in a "frozen form" in order to "indicate" changes, effects, and specific theoretical conceptualisations at work, e. g. between time 1 and time 2 in fixed data sets.

## Theory pluralism

This real nature of "data" also becomes more important when seen in connection with the following. In addition to the challenges with the concept of "data" in itself, there is the challenges of theory pluralism, made popular in anthropology as the "Rashomon" effect (Heider 1988). This name is taken from its namesake film by Akira Kurosawa, wrought around a story where three people have totally different accounts of "the same" event where they were all present simultaneously.

The formal structure in this challenge is well known in logic as an implication of the false inference called "affirming the consequent". The fallacy is illustrated in the following, logically valid syllogism where the major and minor premises about fishes and whales are both false, while the conclusion is true. The true observation that whales are warm-blooded still follows logically as conclusion from the false premises. Concluding bottom-up *from* true conclusions that the premises are true, is a fallacy, however. Replacing fishes with M shows that claiming *anything* (X) is warm blooded: i. e. an endless number of theories, could "prove" deductively that whales are warm blooded in this valid syllogism.

| | |
|---|---|
| Premise 1: **All**<br>Major premise / ***Explanans*** (***interpretans)1*** | M (fishes [or Xs]) are P (warm blooded) |
| Premise 2: **All**<br>Minor / ***Explanans*** (***interpretans***) 2 | S (whales) are M (fishes [Xs]) |
| Conclusion: **All** ***Explanandum (interpretandum)*** – Observation | S (whales) are P (warm blooded) |

The point is that false premises *can* prove true conclusions (which is what the Rashomon syndrome poses as a dilemma). You cannot conclude that the premises, i. e. that any specific explanation is true merely from the fact that the present premises *could* produce the observed true conclusions logically (affirming the consequent), since an endless number of theories could. Since this inference is used in the currently popular, so-called *abduction* or *retroduction* as conceived even by Peirce as "a weak kind of argument" "reasoning from consequent to antecedent" (Peirce 1992: 189, Fann 1970), it needs to solve the challenge. *Abduction* is no safe haven either. Since only knowledge related to the "analysis" of specific and unequivocal "data units" is acknowledged as scientific knowledge, this posits another challenge as part of the Trojan horse in the middle of science. But neither the crumbling demarcation walls around

science nor the Rashomon syndrome justifies that anything goes. It only shows that the post-modern dissolution of science lies as a threatening possibility right underneath the surface, in the internal structures of modernist science. It needs critical consideration.

Action researchers are not primarily occupied with generating knowledge about external objects in the physical world, however. The attention of action research is directed towards ways in which learning, human actions, and social change processes, in and between people in organisational settings and elsewhere, can generate and gather insights and understandings into common, shared, as well as idiosyncratic patterns, from and for practitioners' ways-of-doing-things in organisations, and in other social contexts. Fortunately, the discipline of research methodology itself incorporates such practical insights and understandings. Such a processual perspective on knowledge struggles, however, when confronted with "data" as fixed, unchanging, and unambiguous bits of information. This means that, if squeezed into the reasoning of natural science, processes of knowledge generation from within practices disappear as "un-datafiable", and we are left without a valid way to articulate the processesual and experiential aspects of the knowledge generated.

Answering the challenge for action research of how we can convey this knowledge in a transparent way, which others (researchers, practitioners, citizens) also can understand and evaluate critically, however, we now might learn from the discipline of methodology as the articulated common professional competence core of conventional social researchers. Basic social, organisational, psychological, and similar historical and societal competence and conceptual knowledge may simply be irreducibly methodological in character. Continuously fluent processes are not chaotic. At this point, our working hypothesis has evolved to a tentative claim that we may have what we need if we take into consideration the critically reasoning and careful handling of language that is implied in *immanent critique,* starting *in medias res* with "*geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*" and with the always already extant Trojan horse methods of conventional research methodology.

## 2.4 Gnoseology – what specifies action research as different? Sorting it out.

To grasp the added value of articulating the intuitions of action researchers even more adequately, we take a short detour to the *gnoseology* table below, showing different forms of knowing: **gnôsis**-forms, –elicited from the thinking of Aristotle. The scheme, developed and explained in Eikeland (1997, 2008, 2013, 2022), distinguishes between different ways of knowing. The ancient Greek word **gnôsis**, *Kenntnis* in German, means acquaintance or familiarity as a much wider concept of knowledge than **epistêmê.** An epistemology has in a sense already decided and chosen its "favourite", i. e. **epistêmê,** as its standard of measurement. In contrast, *gnoseology* is the study of several different cognitive (**gnôristikós**) forms or ways-of-knowing illustrated in the table.

The Aristotelian gnoseology is multidimensional, relational, non-reductionist, and complex. Our argument is that for action research to realise its specific added research and other values, it cannot use the table's specific **epistêmê$_2$** (privileged by modernity) as its only and ultimate standard, since it is adjusted to and belongs to knowers-researchers positioned outside and separate from their known-researched object. Gnoseology does not. This kind of extraneous **epistêmê$_2$** was *secondary* and *applied* in the thinking of Aristotle. The primary and more basic form: **epistêmê$_1$** was understood as an articulation of **praxis**-forms. While as-

tronomy was the paradigmatic model for **epistêmê$_2$** or **theôrêsis** in the table, grammar should be seen as paradigmatic for the kind of action research theory we are after, as the extraction of **theôría** as **praxis**-forms from the inside of ways-of-doing-things: from the inside of **praxis.** To do *basic* research, then, you need to be a practitioner and think first-person-thoughts critically from inside ways-of-doing-things.

A gnoseology like the table's is more adequate to the extant diversity of knowledge forms. Instead of subordinating all forms not fulfilling the requirements of science (**epistêmê**) as inferior, as does modern epistemology: gnoseology recognises different relations and forms of expertise more or less adequate to whatever is researched or known. It also accepts starting points for gradual and critical developments from anywhere in prevalent **doxa** (**éndoxa**) of different communities of practice (in the ruins of the fallen Popperian demarcation lines), and shows how the different knowledge forms are rooted in **praxis** as permeating the others. The forms in this table are neither necessarily mutually exclusive nor fully comprehensive, however. Other relational forms are imaginable and could be added.

The forms are based on different relations between knower and known. First, moving down the table from the top, from 1 through 7, there is a gradual approachement between knower and known, from clear-cut separation and distance in (1) through different forms of interaction in (2–4), to overlap and identity or indistinctness in (5–7). As part of these differences, the location of *the source of change* in what is studied and known also switches between knower and known. In both forms of theory (1 & 7), the source lies inside the known. That is why they are both theoretical with Aristotle. In 2–4 the source is outside the known. In **pathos** the known is in us as knowers, but the source of change is external. In 3–4 the known is external but the source of change is in us as manipulators and users, i.e. outside the known. The relations between means and ends shift similarly. In **gnôsis**-forms 1 through 4, means and ends are formally different and separable, in 5 through 7, they are formally identical and inseparable. In 1–4 the means are disposable or exchangeable instruments or tools, in 5–7 the ends are inherent in the means as the virtuoso performance grows from inchoate starting points inside **praxis.** Practice makes perfect. As the table indicates, for Aristotle specific ways of using language: **lógos**-forms, correspond to **gnôsis**-forms with their purposes or ends.

These different relations *define* specific forms of general acquaintance, knowledge-knowing, or competence, relations that are required to learn and develop the specific forms. You become a mechanic, carpenter, or mason through practising and through apprenticeship learning, you become a driver the same way, but the first one by learning to change or manipulate something as *material*, the second one by using something as an *instrument* without intentionally changing it. Indeed, you become a researcher in any field in the same way. As indicated, there are two forms of **epistêmê** or theory, (1) **theôrêsis** = **epistême$_2$** and (7) **theôría** = **epistêmê$_1$.** Astronomy has served as a historical paradigm for **theôrêsis** as theory-form, grammar could serve as a similar paradigm for the second form of theory or **theôría.**

The way Aristotle distinguishes, **praxis**-forms do *not* relate to external entities at all, as do forms 1–4. Instead, **praxis** relates to internal, shared objectives as internal standards of performance: i.e. **eupraxía** or good practice, like we all do in grammar. We share grammar and grammatical forms in common, as equals, as necessary preconditions for being able to communicate. As Aristotle describes it, so it is with ethical and political virtues like justice, friendship, etc. They form mutually shared and common standards for all, as preconditions for optimal, coordinated interaction, as a common good. In **praxis** the knower and known are

**Table 1:** Aristotelian **gnoseology:** forms of acquaintance and ways of knowing

| Basis | | Acquaintance-form **gnôsis**-form | Associated rationality | English equivalents | Articulating and articulated theoretical wisdom: **sophía** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Practised forms of **héxeis** (pl *of* **héxis**) or *habitûs* (pl *of habitus*) | ***Aísthêsis*** (*persepsjon*) | *1.***Theôrêsis** = **epistêmê**$_2$ | **Apódeixis** (deduksjon, demonstrasjon), didaktikk | Spectators' conceptions (observation), "objectively" explanatory, predictive modelling (traditional theory) | |
| | | *2.**Páthos*** | ?? | *suffering*; "passion"; to bear, endure, undergo passively / receptively / "passionately" from the outside | |
| | **Empeiría** (praktisk tilegnet og opparbeidet erfaring) og **enérgeia** (virksomhet/ virkelighet) | *3.**Khrêsis*** | **Tékhnê** (calculation, **logismós**) | *Use* of external(ised) objects as instruments or tools without intentionally changing them | |
| | | *4.**Poíêsis*** | | *Making: produce / bring forth / create*; by manipulating external objects and material, forming material in accordance with plan | |
| | | *5.***Praxis**$_2$ | **Phrónêsis** (practical wisdom, prudentia) specitifc form of deliberation or **boúleusis**) | *Doing*; performance, practical reasoning and ethical deliberation | |
| | | *6.***Praxis**$_1$ | Critical (distinguishing, sorting) dialectics / dialogue as reflection The way from *novice to expert*, from tacit to articulated knowing | Practising, exercise, rehearsing, trying for developing competence, mastery, **aretê** and insight (**theôría**) | |
| | | *7.***Theôría** = **epistêmê**$_1$ | Critical, inductive dialogue, the way to insight (**hê hodós**) | Insight, understanding of forms, patterns (critical theory) | |

strongly overlapping or identical. The ethico-political virtues are forms of **praxis.** If our relationships to others slide into **khrêsis** or **poiêsis:** i.e. **tékhnê,** where someone *uses* or *manipulates* others for private or other purposes extraneous to those others, or even into **theôrêsis** or **pathos**, the relationships transform gradually into relationships where nothing is common between knower and known as Aristotle describes them. Still, these (1–4) are the forms, according to which modern epistemology and the forms it has recognized, is cast.

For our purpose, it suffices to emphasise that among the **gnôsis**-forms in the table, what has been left on the outside of "science" in modernity, **praxis** and **theôría**, are exactly what action research, together with vocations and professions, must learn to take hold of and develop. Leaving **praxis** and **theôría** outside has failed, as indicated by the Trojan horse above. After deconstructing the demarcation wall between "data" and theory as "scientific" inside, and "unscientific" experience "outside" the walls, claiming this is both justified and possible. It would take us too far to go into details, however. As suggested, the officially expelled and exiled ways of learning and exploring, still hides *within* the walls as the methods of methodology itself. **Praxis** develops from inchoate beginnings with novices, to expertise and virtuosity as ultimate forms in any and every field, even within conventional research. Hence, the **gnôsis**-forms do not necessarily exclude each other.

**Praxis** permeates all forms, since this way of learning and development through immanent critique goes through all the different gnoseological relations. As the way or **hodós** of the others (Jensen & Eikeland 2020), this is what core action research needs to take hold of. Under whatever label or designation, this is the specific value added which action research represents. To summarise: We argue that the specific core of action research we are searching for is more like grammar, i.e. like forms and ways-of-doing-things we always already, and inadvertently live, do, and share as *geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, while normal, conventional science: searching for prediction and control of the known, has been moulded historically into forms 1–4 as externally based spectator's- or visitors'-research, imagining a clean-cut base positioned outside history and society for itself as knower, from which to observe, explain, and intervene in the known. Even interpretive social research is struggling in the wake of these forms, but without really exploring the table's forms 5–7 for fear of moving too far outside the imagined demarcation walls.

The relational perspective implies that different knowledge forms are mutually independent, with their own ways of learning and validity criteria, but also interdependent and related to each other. Therefore, both the idea of a uniform "unity of science" as well as postmodern ideas about an endless diversity of equally (in-)valid and juxtaposed knowledge forms are both foreign to the gnoseology of Aristotle. Gnoseology still paves the way for a closer integration of traditional, practical, tacit, emotional, experiential, and intuitive forms of knowing, however, which is the argument in this article for playing with the gnoseology as a possible basis for developing an adequate language for modern action research. Furthermore, the argument for our gnoseology-base is that we can throw new light on the terminological problems above, as the table helps us realise that, in modern science and research, some of the knowledge forms (1–4) like **theôrêsis**, **epistêmê$_2$**, **tékhnê**, and **pathos**, have illegitimately been given a universal hierarchical priority and superiority, or are seen as more valid representations of knowledge than others. However, Aristotle's other forms of knowledge and knowing provide us with possible paths to rediscover specific conceptualizations of the "added-values-insights" of action research.

## 2.4 Towards a conclusion

Often, action research is described as "applied" science or research. This may mean either the application of results of a methodologically separate and specialised scientific research, or it could mean the application of mainstream research methods for practical, not theoretical purposes. Applied research is, on many occasions, quite useful for the development of new products, services, procedures, ways of organising etc. But mostly, in these kinds of projects, the researchers remain detached from practice, i.e. from the application, and from the people involved (for instance patients, employees, users, citizens etc.) and the relationship between researchers and people involved is still based on the traditional division of labour between knower and known, researcher and researched (or appliers / users), where the principled distinction between researcher and practitioner is maintained as in the table's **theôrêsis** and **tékhnê.** Application *is* technical.

The previous paragraphs indicate a radical turn of relationships, however. The most clearly applied **gnôsis**-form in the table is **theôrêsis** or **epistêmê$_2$**, the most basic are **praxis** and **theôría.** In principle, **theôrêsis** necessarily applies concepts better known and understood to explain less understood observations, without asking how what is used to explain: explanatory theories and premises, become better known in the first place. The challenges above concerning "data" and theory-pluralism inhere specifically in **theôrêsis.** For Aristotle, basic research or generation of knowledge and insights happens through the gradual and distinguishing development and enactment of **praxis** and **theôría.** Hence, action research differs from applied science, among other things because action research emphasises co-creating both knowledge and change (personal, organisational, communitarian or social) through engaging in common practices, e.g. through dialogically based processes where people (without socially determined divisions of labour) come together to experiment with new initiatives and actions in practice, sharing critically as equals through dialogue and cycles of learning through doing and reflection, trying things out. Initiatives and actions are evaluated both con- and recurrently during the process by the people involved. This means that practice is constantly developed and improved by the many voices involved in, and contributing to the change, reflection, and knowledge creating processes, in principle as done in developing the discipline of methodology.

Some co-creative action research projects are still based on a collaboration between professional researchers and practitioners, where what they bring with them from their "home bases" to the dialogical co-creation encounter has quite different bases; substantial practical experiences or theoretical models and conventional research results respectively. In such cases, where background knowledge and experience differ radically, the borderline between action-based development and application of preconceived knowledge is hardly clear. It means another social demarcation line is disintegrating. Some action researchers prefer the terms "researcher" and "co-researcher" or name all participants as "co-researchers" (inclusive the researchers from the university or similar institutions). However, as higher education becomes increasingly socially distributed not only hierarchically within industrialised societies, but between cultures world wide as well, the principled distinctions become hard to maintain.

Hence, compared to applied and conventional science, action research operates with a "post-demarcation-line-distinction" between "researcher" and "practitioner". Practitioners and researchers are colleagues, both knowers and known but still recognises informal and

temporary differences between "masters" and "apprentices". In other words, action research offers a completely different frame and very different conditions for participation in the knowledge production process than seen in conventional or applied research. Herein lies the democratic and transformative potential and possibilities for personal, organisational, and societal impact, and even for basic insights into and understanding of real interpersonal, organisational, and societal conditions and patterns.

Both applied science and conventional science are shaped according to knowledge forms dominant during modernity belonging to **theôrêsis** and **tékhnê**, or they keep struggling in their wake. The real "knower" in applied science is still usually understood as the academic researcher, who is positioned as an expert and maintains a monopoly of defining which kind of knowledge counts. The main understanding of knowledge production in this research tradition is understood as representing a separate and external "reality" and as such, transmittable from individual A to individual B as if words made by speech-sounds and written letters carry competence and knowledge in themselves, and with validity challenges already indicated. action research offers a frame for knowing and knowledge development, which is wider than and very different from, the traditional idea of representation and theoretical transmission. action research is concerned with development and transformation through collaborative processes of knowledge creation, sometimes labeled "co-creation", "co-production", or "co-construction", rooted in **praxis.** action research recognises and involves different ways of knowing as outlined in the gnoseology-table. People with different backgrounds are recognized as significant and indispensable contributors to processes both of change, development, and the generation of basic knowledge and understanding (**theôría**).

## 3. What are we left with?

Our point of departure was that we wanted to describe a landscape, pinpoint challenges, initiate a discussion, and suggest some ways out of dilemmas raised by the often inapt language and conceptual distinctions provided by conventional methods. As action researchers, we *all* need to escape the currently common relapse into, or at least know more clearly what we are doing when, applying normal research methods as "last resorts". They cannot provide a safe "scientific" haven. We need to develop concepts and ways of communicating, which are better adjusted to knowledge production *from within* different practice-forms, adjusted to ways of conceiving and describing collaborative knowledge production and learning processes as they play out in a cross-field of tensions between various discourses and institutionalised practices. Overall, the challenge is that social or human knowledge development and knowledge production needs to come to its own and find its own form, like natural science and technology might be said to have come to its own during modernity.

Our suggested ways out have been immanent critique, basic historical concepts, gnoseology instead of epistemology, and to explore and develop the gnoseology-tables's **praxis$_1$**, **praxis$_2$**, and **theôría** as ways of knowing. Immanent critique is *both* argumentative clarifications *and* development of experience simultaneously, i.e. experiential learning of more or less adequate ways of doing things based on qualitative experimentation, trying things out, and evaluating, summarising, and coalescing experiences. This means to theorize practice

through **praxis**- and experience-based argumentative distinctions and clarifications, as we have tried through this article, and like people have always been doing through the methods of research methodology and even more broadly through apprenticeship learning. action research cannot be reduced to interpretations of, or inferences from data or to data. Our point is not necessarily to abandon e.g. the term "data" completely but to be better able to discuss what we are doing when we resort to conventional methods and terms, and how it possibly could either distort or supplement and support the core of action research.

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# 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

pre-empted and disarmed. Williams (1977: 110) refers to this form of hegemonic power as manifesting in,

> a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living; our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values: constitutive and constituting, which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.

In this way, the political interests that underpin any social reality become invisible, and the potential agentic power of those whose interests are subsumed and distorted by that reality is neutralised (Gramsci, 1971; Berger and Pullberg, 1965). Embedded in everyday practices and vested in dominant discourses (ideological, institutional, cultural, organisational), this form of power shapes the experience of the status quo as an objective feature of life, and mystifies the political and financial interests served by the prevailing social order.

Almost forty years ago, Jameson (1984: 87) recognized neoliberal capitalism's investment in new technology platforms as leading to a system in which,

> … not only punctual and local countercultural forms of cultural resistance and guerrilla warfare, but also even overtly political interventions … are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves may well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it.

The rise of neo-liberalism globally over the past five decades, has led to an "ideological turn" that has centralised the power of global elites in mystified systemic forms that increasingly incorporate institutions and organisations (Hanlon et al., 2017; Monbiot, 2016; Whitehead and Crawshaw, 2014; Peck and Tickell, 2002). In this respect, Handy (1997) points to the contradictions that prevail in this political reality, where national democracies have become subservient to corporate capitalist organisations that are governed along totalitarian lines.

## Facilitating contextual literacy.

As Fricke *et al.* point out, to address these challenges, Action Researchers need to situate their practices clearly in the global neoliberal capitalist context. This means incorporating practices which are focused upon the demystification of the abstract forms of power that maintain this context and finding ways to counter their influence. Given the challenge of addressing what one fails to apprehend, the complexity of this task necessitates the creation of critical reflexive forums where collaborators are drawn from a broad range of social endeavour (Mastio and Dovey, 2021). Without the probing reflexive engagement of participants, the requisite contextual insight is unlikely to be gained. For such engagement to be productive, though, social capabilities need to underpin the confronting-but-never-combative collective endeavour through which relevant, though controversial, issues are scrutinised courageously (Dovey, Burdon, & Simpson, 2017; Burt, Mackay, van der Heijden, & Verheijdt, 2017). These complex relational/communicational capabilities through which contestation of perspectives and interpretations can be addressed, need to be exercised as "a form of caring" (Spicer, Alvesson, & Karreman, 2009: 548). Such caring acknowledges that the contestation is oriented to achieving the most insightful outcomes for the collective. As such, it is framed specifically by the meaningfulness of the collective purpose and their commitment to the realisation of that purpose.

The introduction of an "external critic" to an Action Research community could be useful for the development of contextual literacy (see Sarason, 1972: 250). This person (or group) accepts the invitation to hold the participants accountable to the vision and values of the Action Research; and to ensure their engagement in collaborative reflexive action. The external critic's obligation to the group is to contrast apprehensions of the political reality as these manifest within the group. The external critic is not there to be liked, and has no obligation to any individual but, rather, to the vision and values of the action research (see Dovey and White, 2005). However, in practice, the inclusion of critical reflexive practices, such as those espoused by Cunliffe (2009), is likely to be resisted by those with formal power in the community/organisation, who often view such open and critical relational/communicative practices as "subversive" (Hanlon et al., 2017; Kezar, 2011; Pitelis & Wagner, 2019).

The notion of contextual literacy includes the reading of "self as context". Action Researchers located in universities are especially at risk of allowing values-in-action to contradict espoused values. Personal interests (academic advancement, publication record, etc.) can diminish commitment to the principles of Action Research, resulting in politically compliant behaviour within, and beyond, the Academy. In this respect, continuous clarification of one's values-in-action is important to an authentic commitment to the values that underpin emancipatory action research. Thus, given the insidious influence of hegemonic power, Freire's (1972) concept of *conscientisation* and its enactment within Action Research groups is highly relevant. As Fricke *et al.* point out, Freire's notion of "speaking one's truth" always entails word-in-action and an awareness of "features of the oppressor" within oneself that must be addressed through critical collectively reflexive practices as part of the "emancipatory, critical, and solidary praxis".

## The Academy as the font of Action Researchers.

As Fricke *et al.* comment, the "Academy" has a fraught relationship with Action Research. Historically rejecting it as "subjective" and its results as "ungeneralisable", it has adopted a tactic that Marcuse (1964) referred to as *repressive desublimation.* This refers to a process whereby Action Research is incorporated into the Academy's body of recognised research methodologies, but in a form in which its philosophical assumptions are undermined, and its political intent is surreptitiously neutralised. Furthermore, collaboration with social movements is frowned upon within the Academy, and by editors and reviewers of many academic journals. This has important implications for the nature of the development of aspirant Action Researchers.

## What do Action Researchers need to do to improve their record in addressing surreptitious and manipulative forms of oppressive power?

As Fricke *et al.* state, the entire Action Research community must take on these challenges if it is to survive and contribute meaningfully to the creation of a more equitable and humane

society. Key to such action is the formation of alliances with democratic social movements critical of the neo-liberal status quo. University-based Action Researchers can play a vital role in introducing and facilitating the critical reflexive forums that are required to demystify abstract power; enable contextual insight; and monitor the honouring of the "reflection-action" dialectic of the movement's *praxis.* Through roles such as that of an external critic (Sarason, 1972), university-based Action Researchers can introduce and/or strengthen Action Research practices within social movements; ensure the continuous critical scrutiny of the movement's *espoused* interests versus its *enacted* interests; and mobilise networks of sympathetic power to enhance the capability of social movements to contest the political status quo.

Within the Academy, university-based Action Researchers need to engage in the demystification of the institutional logic which operates surreptitiously in universities. Institutional logic refers to the assumptions and systems of meaning that frame everyday work practices, and through which sense is made of personal and collective experience (Thornton *et al.:* 2012). As Jepperson (1991: 149) points out, institutions are "socially constructed, routine-reproduced programmes or rule systems," with the taken-for-granted status of these rule systems being a fundamental attribute of institutionalisation. Power and interests underpin the creation and re-creation of institutions where "rationalised myths" help to obfuscate the political interests supported by them. As university practices are embedded in an institutional field, over time they constitute a sense of experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for participants in those practices, to think critically. Manifesting in a "routine and seemingly disinterested way", institutional logic, serves "to construct, justify and stabilise the obedience of people" without their own awareness thereof (Lawrence et al., 2001: 630; Courpasson, 2000: 143). The demystification of institutional logic is, thus, a necessary precursor to the authentic operation of Action Research within the Academy's armoury of research methodologies.

In addition to action within the universities in which Action Researchers are located, collective action is required on the conventions of academic journals and the peer review process. Traditional assumptions about what constitutes valid research can be challenged by encouraging respected Action Researchers to take on editorial roles in mainstream journals. Similarly, greater commitment from Action Researchers to reviewing papers in these journals, is required as a contribution to the contestation of the traditional (positivist) assumptions that often inappropriately frame the review of papers utilising an action research methodology.

As Fricke *et al.* point out, pro-social movements generally are not recognised or supported by academic institutions. Furthermore, contesting the power of elites and engaging in processes of demystification of their sources of power is dangerous. Paulo Freire experienced threats to his life and years of exile, and many social leaders are systematically murdered or imprisoned by political regimes across the world. Martin Luther King proclaimed that he only became a real leader once he had overcome his fear of death. His comment points to having clear sources of courage as an important prerequisite for the commitment of Action Researchers to taking on the challenges of demystifying, and mobilising opposition to, the hegemony of ruthless political and financial elites.

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## Discussion

To enrich the discussion initiated by Ken Dovey in the previous paragraphs, Davydd Greenwood and Werner Fricke, two of the authors of *On the Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research* have shared their comments.

### Comments by Davydd Greenwood:

*General comment on the paper:*

– I find this thoughtful and appropriately challenging. I will make some marginal comments on points that deserve further consideration.

*With reference to the use of the term "Action Research methodology":*

– I personally do not accept reducing AR to a methodology. It is a politics, ethics, and a process for orchestrating a wide variety of methods in service of more just and sustainable social arrangements.

*With reference to the importance of accurately apprehending insidious forms of power:*

– While Dovey is aware of economics, his heavy reliance on the concept of power overlooks the role of sheer economic exploitation in framing our current problems. … both political **and** economic interests underpin this exploitation.

*With reference to Dovey's reference to the point made by Handy (1997):*

– Ok but this argument goes back at least to I. Wallerstein.

*With reference to the concept of an "external critic" being invited to participate within an Action Research community:*

– This is an interesting concept but eventually seems to be limited to academics who fill the role when it is possible for municipal actors, union leaders, NGOs and others to also fulfill this role.

*With reference to the adoption of critically reflexive practices by Action Research communities:*

– This is, of course, true but needs more development. There are options for "shuttle diplomacy" and even what Ann Martin called "guerrilla consulting" where the external critic knows it will affect some power holders negatively and simply does not tell them. The shuttle diplomacy option means consolidating various groups of stakeholders until they are strong enough to confront other power holders.

*With reference to Dovey's point that the Academy has a fraught relationship with Action Research:*

– In my opinion, it is not a fraught relationship but one of suppression of all prosocial and democratically-inspired social and humanistic research and protection of the status quo. Saying academics should behave otherwise in Neo-Taylorist universities regulated by

neoliberal audit culture ministries is to underestimate the need for AR to reform universities or found their own.

*With reference to university-based Action Researchers playing the role of an "external critic" (Sarason, 1972) in social movements:*

– While I do not reject this role, I do not see it as exclusive to university-based Action Researchers, AR is also practiced in NGOs, some municipal governments, some unions (LO in Norway, for example) and can sit on a broader base than just the academy which itself is under siege.

*With reference to the need to demystify institutional logic as a necessary precursor to the authentic operation of Action Research within the Academy:*

– There have been 20 years of this "demystification" accompanied by an increasing hegemony of neoliberal management of universities. Demystification without "teeth" has not worked.

## Comments by Werner Fricke:

I agree with Davydd's comments on Ken Dovey's discussion piece, especially with his first and second comments: According to our research experience, Action Research cannot be reduced to a methodology. AR is a rich social process, openly based on democratic values such as democratic participation and dialogue. It is, as Davydd points out, "a process for orchestrating a wide variety of methods in service of more just and sustainable social arrangements".

My second point is about capitalist economy as a source of power. At the beginning of his paper, Ken states that "power manifests in many complex forms"; this general statement is certainly correct, but Ken distinguishes only two forms, namely "agentic power" and "abstract forms of power". The latter form, in his view, operates surreptitiously and insidiously. "Demystifying" it by accurately comprehending the abstract forms of power and "their insidious influence however constitutes a daunting proposition" for Action Researchers, Ken argues. I fear that this wording (insidious influence, demystification) promotes a kind of mystification of power particularly when there are more appropriate categories available for understanding the phenomenon of power. Examples are:

– structural power or violence (Galtung, 1996)
– power as an aspect of all social relations (Foucault, 1982)
– capital as a form of power enforced on employees to make them hand over their products and the surplus of their work to capital owners without having a say how to use or distribute those products and surpluses
– dialogue as an enactment of power (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2021)

Conceptualised this way it is indeed difficult to understand the many different forms of power and how they are executed. It is challenging and sometimes dangerous [see e. g. the Highlander Centre′s experiences (Horton et al. 1990)] to be confronted with power in Action Research practice and trying to democratise its use. But it need not be a daunting proposition for Action Researchers' work to favour and strengthen social democracy. Courage is needed

to face power in Action Research, but in many situations it is a test of patience, skill, and commitment our discussion paper on future perspectives for AR argues.

Finally, I want to say that I agree with Ken Dovey, when he mentions mutual advantages for both Action Researchers and social movement actors that would arise from their cooperation. As Ken points out, especially important to both groups of collaborators is the "continuous critical scrutiny of the various movement's espoused interests versus their enacted interests", even as their cooperation may mobilise "networks of sympathetic power to enhance the capability of social movements" (and of Action Research, I might add) to contest the social status quo. Of equal importance is Ken's idea to encourage respected Action Researchers to take on editorial roles in mainstream journals and/or in peer review processes. All the co-authors have experience in this area, sometimes successful and sometimes difficult. Clearly academia, in its present form, is one of the strongholds supporting neoliberal, conservative forces in our societies and is indeed another arena needing democratisation.

Last but not least, the existence of a gap between espoused and enhanced values does sometimes occur in Action Research practice too. The above-mentioned book by Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen is an impressive example of Action Researchers' self-reflexivity and self-criticism. The authors analyse several Action Research processes which were not able to avoid this espoused/enhanced-values-gap. So to be fair, social movements are not the only actors who have this problem, but Action Researchers also do encounter difficulties in acting according to their values, especially within often hostile social environments. In other words: Action Research and social movements fighting for social democracy often face the same ethical problems. To become successful allies, they must cooperate on equal footing and understand each other′s strengths and weaknesses in a collaborative way.

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## Ken Dovey's Response

I will first respond to Davydd and Werner's shared rejection of the notion of Action Research as a "research methodology". I think that we need to distinguish between *praxis* as a "a process for orchestrating a wide variety of methods in service of more just and sustainable social arrangements" (Davydd's point) and *action research* as incorporating the practice of publicly sharing the knowledge gained from the honouring of the dialectical relationship

between "theoretically-informed-action" and "action-informed-theory". As much of the sharing of the knowledge gained from Action Research generally occurs through academic journals and conferences, conforming to the conventions of academically-endorsed methodologies embedded in the publication process, is mandatory within the Academy (this is less the case with books). As research publications are an expected dimension of the work of academics, the Academy as the font of Action Researchers incorporates the notion of a research methodology being applicable to all research activity. I have no problem with this if the philosophical (ontological and epistemological) assumptions that underpin the practices of Action Researchers are honoured. In my experience, though, these assumptions, which are crucial to the framing of the reflexive action of action researchers, are perverted and "disarmed" surreptitiously through the way action research is addressed in mandatory "research methodology" classes.

Both Davydd and Werner agree that greater collaboration between Academy-based Action Researchers and those located within social movements is needed. Such collaboration would enrich the processes through which the tacit learning gained from social action can be transformed into explicit forms of knowledge that strategically inform subsequent spirals of action, and that can be shared publicly more easily

On the issue of power, I agree with both authors on "the role of sheer economic exploitation in framing our current problems" (Davydd's comment). However, in addition to the visibility of the privileges and abuses that economic power underpins, many important aspects of it are mystified. As my quote from Williams states, such power infiltrates "a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living; … It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming". In this way, the hegemony of global elites manifests in the unwitting acceptance by the oppressed of the politico-economic status quo as "natural" and "inevitable". In this respect, as Freire pointed out, features of the oppressor are internalised as the oppressed unwittingly consent to their own oppression.

Werner feels that I am ignoring certain forms of power in my focus upon abstract forms of power. With respect to his examples, I agree that all relationships have a power dimension, and that power is a resource through which humans make things happen: good and bad. My concern is that abstract forms of power manifest in many social contexts without their influence being apprehended by participants in those contexts. As I pointed out in the paper, they manifest through ideology, institutional logic, enterprise logic, culture, etc., etc. The word limit of the paper restricted my coverage of all these forms of mystified power. Certainly, as Werner points out, structural power is another important form of abstract power (one that manifests in social movements too) that refers to organisational arrangements that over time constitute a sense of experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for embedded participants to think. As the structure and associated practices are reified, alternative forms of everyday arrangements and of problem solving are rendered unimaginable (Seo and Creed, 2002: 235). They influence practices in a routine way and predetermine the nature of the rules of the politico-economic game, inherently mobilising its self-sustaining bias (Soulsby and Clark, 2013). Hardy and Clegg (1999: 377) view structural power as permeating "the fibre and fabric of everyday life," reflecting and reproducing the organising principles that underpin the accepted nature of social and economic behaviour. My point in listing these references to structural power is that they reflect the view of it being another form of abstract power that manifests surreptitiously and, usually, insidiously. Unless Action Researchers, whether col-

laborating with social movements or not, become aware of "the oppressor within", their agency is likely to be compromised and disarmed.

Regarding Davydd's point on "the need for AR to reform universities or found their own", my perspective is that, as has been the case with historical forms of *praxis* aimed at achieving and sustaining democratic ideals and social justice, Action Researchers should operate within the "belly of the monster". As agreed by both authors, such action will require courage and strategic sophistication, but it will also enrich the learning that can be gained from such appropriately situated action. It is unlikely that the "monster" will be slayed by hiding from it! Acts intending to demystify its power bases can only "gain teeth" if Action Researchers learn to apprehend how abstract forms of power manifest in the contexts in which their social action is executed.

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## The Author

Ken Dovey held professorial positions in several South African and Australian universities over a 40-year academic career. Now retired, he continues to teach on university executive education programs and to consult to a variety of organizations on the issue of leadership. He is an active researcher, involved primarily in action research projects that focus upon the conceptualisation of leadership as a collective achievement.

# 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 (Comissión 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

critical and empathetical companion in the process of knowing. The contact with a great variety of traditions and practices has challenged me to be humbler, and understand that Action Research is always contextual, while being attentive to a couple of general principles, such as respect for the other as true partner in knowing, and the collective construction of a world where there is space for all to live with dignity.

**Richard and Miren:**
Paulo Freire's work has been extremely influential across the world. What do you see as Freire's contribution to the field of Action Research?

**Danilo:**
Paulo Freire cannot be considered an Action Researcher in the canonical tradition of Action Research. His writings would hardly ever be accepted in our academically oriented Action Research journals. Reviewers would require references to other studies as well as to the theoretical foundations of his reflections. The methodic rigorousness he frequently refers to in his writings is anchored in different epistemic settings based on ethical and political principles. From Freire we learn that research is a dimension: not the only one, for sure, of social transformation, and that this transformation is a complex process that requires a trans-disciplinary perspective which in its turn requires trust among the partners. In an interview about Action and Participatory Research he interestingly concentrates his answer on the importance of trust. As put by Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, another key person in Participatory Research, in classical positivist research you rely on trustworthy instruments, in traditional qualitative research you trust yourself as producer of relevant data, and in Participatory Research you regard the other as a trustworthy companion to produce knowledge. As I understand Paulo Freire, these three dimensions do not exclude themselves mutually, but the last is the one that cannot be missing in Action or Participatory Research.

**Richard and Miren:**
Thinking about what Freire's legacy means today, what are the implications of Freire's views on capitalism and liberation? Has Freire been understood in North America and Europe?

**Danilo:**
In 2021 we celebrated the centenary of Paulo Freire's birth. I think that the most optimistic Freirean could not have expected such a massive revisiting of his ideas and his work all over the world, particularly in Latin America. The metaphor of Paulo Freire as a "the walking tree", coined by the Colombian educator and researcher Alfonso Torres, seems to capture the importance of Paulo Freire's legacy. In the generous shadow of the mango tree, different people gather today to resist what is known as disaster capitalism, both socially and environmentally, and look for alternatives. This tree has a strong trunk as well as deep roots. Poetic license allows us to see this tree as not static or fixed in a given space, but moving among peoples. A couple of days ago I saw in a TV series a painter who kept reproducing the same landscape, only changing perspectives or details. That is a little how I see Paulo Freire, who throughout his life kept reminding us that humanisation is a possibility that we actualize in history and can never be taken for granted. The risk of dehumanisation is always there, and today we are faced with it at every corner. That is why his legacy sounds so up to date today, and is reinvented in different parts of the world, in different ways. In the spirit of Freire, who

once referred to himself as a vagabond of the obvious, I do not consider it necessary to advocate for an orthodox reading of Paulo Freire, as if in Europe and North America, for example, they would need to have the same understanding of his work as we do in Latin America.

**Richard and Miren:**
Systematisation is a term that is often used in Latin America. However, there are Action researchers in other parts of the world that might not be familiar with it. What is meant by systematisation"?

**Danilo:**
Systematisation of experience developed alongside Action and Participatory Research in Latin America. Its history goes back to social work, from where it spread to other social practices, not necessarily within the academic context. I would consider systematisation of experience as part of the large and diverse family of Action Research in its critical tradition since they share important epistemological and political principles, like overcoming the dichotomy between theory and practice, the non-neutrality of research, the search for criteria of scientific rigorousness outside the positivistic paradigm. A distinctive feature of systematisation of experience is the centrality of daily life experience within the specific cultural and historical context. One basic step in the research process, therefore, is the "reconstruction" of the particular experience by the participants, connecting personal and collective memories and projections. Another feature is the not subordination to the academic logic allowing space for emotions and body expressions, which in Latin America is called "mística". That's why systematisation is usually situated in a space between the academic and the social world. Gradually it is being accepted as a legitimate academic research methodology, hopefully resisting being coopted within a logic that easily becomes self-serving.

**Richard and Miren:**
IJAR published accounts of your work on Participatory Budgeting. What is the significance of this intervention in political processes? And, what are the practical implications for the future of democracy?

**Danilo:**
Participatory Budgeting was developed in Porto Alegre as a key feature of the Workers Party government. The basic assumption is that democratic participation should allow people to have their say when it comes to the core of any public planning: the allocation of public resources. The administration created an interesting process combining the identification of basic thematic areas for the whole city and then particular projects, both local and for the whole city. This process was later taken to the state level in Rio Grande do Sul with a population of over 10 million. In the process we were able to see the potential for citizenship commitment when provided space and opportunity. At the same time, we could also see the maneuvers to reduce participation to eventually voting on particular projects without any public discussion whatsoever. While today, when democracies are at risk in many places, as in Brazil, and we are quite happy to keep at least a democratic formality, experiments such as Participatory Budgeting will continue to challenge the establishment.

**Richard and Miren:**
You have been a strong advocate of strengthening links between different Action Research traditions around the world, such as in Latin America and Europe. What has been the practical importance of your own German ancestry, and your fluency in Portuguese, Spanish and English?

**Danilo:**
I have not given much thought to the way I developed the interest, as you put it, in strengthening the links between different traditions of Action Research. In the small village where I grew up there is a cultural mix of German, Italian, Portuguese, Indian and Afro-descendants, as in many parts of Brazil. I also had the opportunity to study abroad, do consultancy in many Latin American countries, and learn with and from colleagues from different countries. And then when I go back to the post Second World War experiences, specially in the 1960$^{th}$, I realise that in many parts of the world, sometimes without knowing from each other, people were trying to experiment with research practices that had similar foundations, from Systematisation of Experience and Participatory Research in Latin America to Grounded Theory and Action Research in the United States and Europe. What I mean is that if we broaden our perspective, we become aware that different nomenclatures sometimes refer to quite similar practices.

**Richard and Miren:**
You are also familiar with European and Latin American experiences of territorial development. For Freire, territorial development is about engaging and empowering people. Based on what you have learnt in these different contexts, can this produce lasting change?

**Danilo:**
I have learned about Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) with Miren and her colleagues at Orkestra. It is a way of bridging among stakeholders that make up the same territory, from government to workers' unions, from big business to small enterprises and NGOs. It is also an endeavour where transdisciplinarity needs to be exercised, thus overcoming the traditional academic disciplinarity and individual research projects. As in all social activities, including Action Research, there is no guarantee of lasting changes, but I believe in what Orlando Fals Borda once called "participatory Quixotism". Paulo Freire, on his turn, reminds us that perhaps we should be humbler in terms of individual roles in producing historical changes without giving up the hope that our work makes a difference.

**Richard and Miren:**
Particularly during the Covid pandemic, we have made increasing use of online communications, and new patterns of international collaboration have developed. How can we build on those developments, and bring about lasting changes?

**Danilo:**
The Covid pandemic has highlighted our global interconnectedness. There were no geographic, cultural, political or social frontiers for the virus, although, as we know, the virus affected people and societies in different ways. We have learned to use digital platforms as a regular tool for working with others in our countries as well as on an international scale. It

seems to me that this experience of sending a link for a conversation or meeting will remain. At the same time, we will have to learn how to combine the use of these tools with physical encounters which are essential for what could be called an "embodied" collaboration where the other person is seen within his/her context and circumstances.

**Richard and Miren:**
Interdisciplinary studies are another relevant feature in your career. How and why have interdisciplinary studies been central to your work? What is the role of comparisons, and of learning from differences?

**Danilo:**
For most of us who work with education, interdisciplinarity is not an option but a necessity to understand the complexity involved in teaching and learning; in knowing. We can see this in the work of historical references in education such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, José Martí, John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Today, we are realising that the big issues society is facing on a global level extrapolate the sphere of single disciplines, while not denying their importance. Among these issues today stand out sustainability of life on the planet and an effective democratic future. In my career I was fortunate to encounter colleagues from different disciplines from whom I continue learning. For instance, working with historians we embraced the study of the hidden or forgotten sources of the rich tradition of resistance and creativity of Latin American pedagogy. Participatory Budgeting is better understood with the collaboration of a colleague from Political Science/Sociology and another one from Feminist theory. It was a quite natural way into comparison as a methodological tool. When dealing with differences we are always comparing. The question then arises about what we are actually comparing that would allow at the same time respecting the differences and promoting a fruitful dialogue among experiences. Far from considering myself an expert in comparative studies I came to be involved in contributing to develop a framework for comparative studies on pedagogies of participation and more recently on institutionalizing inter and transdisciplinarity.

**Richard and Miren:**
We continue the interview with two other relevant concepts in your Action Research journey, decolonisation and decoloniality. Why is there now particular focus on issues of decolonisation and decoloniality? Is there a need for new political concepts and movements, in the context of problems of global capitalism?

**Danilo:**
A Brazilian sociologist, Octavio Ianni, argues that Latin America is a reality in search of a concept. This may also be true for other parts of the world, but it seems that in Latin America the question of "who we are" as a people acquires a special urgency. Colonisation with centuries of slavery left profound marks in our societies with indecent levels of inequality, with continuing racism and "machismo". The point is not to play the victims of the past, but to understand the extension of this past into the present and avoid its contamination of a future that should be less unjust for most people and less exploitative of nature. The concept of coloniality, respectively, decoloniality, seems to capture the objective and subjective dimensions of the various forms of domination and oppression. An important ingredient in the

concept is that it highlights the role of race in the historical development of modernity where in the name of a "higher" civilization original inhabitants of the "new" land could be eliminated and others could be enslaved. This does not mean that the emancipatory principle of European enlightenment should be discarded, but we should strive for what Enrique Dussel, an Argentinian-Mexican philosopher, calls transmodernity, where modernity is inscribed within a broader historical and social context.

**Richard and Miren:**
Continuing with that, you are co-leading a current international collaboration on "Decolonisation of Knowledge Production and Dissemination", with a focus on Brazil and South Africa. The collaboration is supported by BRICS. What have you learned during the first seminar series? What are the implications?

**Danilo:**
This seminar with participants from Brazil and South Africa was a great learning experience, and an adequate answer to your question would go beyond the scope of an interview. Here I only register two of these leanings. One of them is that coloniality is a process that manifests itself in different ways. For instance, in South Africa the still open wounds of apartheid and in Brazil the centuries of slavery have different effects on social practices. "Rage" has been a concept that appears strongly in the African experience, while in Brazil the persistent racial discrimination is hidden behind a gloss of equality. I have also realised how coloniality/decoloniality should not be seen as a progressive linear process from minus to plus, or from a negative to a positive pole, but as a permanent tension, as we have learned from Paulo Freire about humanisation and dehumanisation. While we strive for humanisation there is always the risk of dehumanisation since both are possibilities that are actualized within the contradictions of history.

**Richard and Miren:**
During your period as Editor-in-Chief of IJAR, the international diversity of published papers has greatly increased. We have several questions. How have you encouraged this development? And how have you engaged in dialogue with contributors?

**Danilo:**
When I was challenged by Werner Fricke to accept the task of becoming editor-in-chief of the International Journal of Action Research I had serious doubts if I would be able to carry out the job adequately, for various reasons. English is not my native language and I am aware of my linguistic limits. Furthermore, besides Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire, few names of Latin American intellectuals circulate in the arena of Action Research. At the same time, I felt that the scope of Action Research could benefit, for example, if more of Latin America could be publicized, and IJAR could be a vehicle for that. This also applies for practices in other parts of the world, and I am glad that we started to get more papers from other places that were not on the map of Action Research. This merit has to be shared with the fellow editors who always supported me, and to the publishers: first Rainer Hampp Verlag, and now Barbara Budrich Verlag, who allowed the journal to construct its own road.

**Richard and Miren:**

You have also worked in the organisation of the series of IJAR symposia, every two years. What has their role been?

**Danilo:**
I understand that the role of a journal is not simply to publish papers, but to have a formative role in the field. This is usually accomplished through the editorial guidelines and through the reviewing process, which is fine. But a journal can be and do more, and that is how the symposia started. They can provide a space for authors to meet and discuss their work; it is particularly a dialogical space for educating ourselves as more experienced researchers together with researchers who are coming to the field, and do not have a training in Action Research in their university courses. The fact of being itinerant also provides the opportunity to know in loco particular developments of Action Research. As the next one will be in Istanbul, I have great expectation to know about the type of Action Research carried out through the Arama Chair of Action Research established at Sabanci University and led by Oğuz Babüroğlu

**Richard and Miren:**
You have developed a distinctive style of leadership of IJAR, with a central place for succession planning. What does this tell us about the potential role of an international journal?

**Danilo:**
Probably based on my experience when invited by Werner Fricke, the former editor-in-chief, I was aware that there are plenty of reasons for most colleagues politely not accepting the invitation to lead the editorial board. At the same time, I also know from experience that when there is team work, and if the work is regarded as worthwhile, someone will carry the stick one more mile. And here is Miren Larrea exploring new possibilities for the journal with a renewed team of editors. It is a gratifying feeling when I see that the journal is a living collective project.

**Richard and Miren:**
We want to have some final reflections now about the future. Should we see Action Research as a movement, bringing together diverse traditions, and challenging academic power structures? Alternatively, does it simply offer a marginal critique of mainstream academic orthodoxy and positivist scientific research?

**Danilo:**
I see the future as a horizon, a vision or utopia, towards which we want to walk, but at the same time recognising that features of this future are already present in our daily life actions, here and now. They are what Paulo Freire calls *inéditos viáveis* (untested feasibilities), which carry the seeds of the future we envision. I am not too concerned about Action Research becoming hegemonic or being part of the hegemonic research practices. I have learned from popular education that there is always a price to be paid by institutionalisation, and that therefore it is preferably to keep a healthy tension between the "instituted" and the "instituting". I would prefer seeing Action Research being always on the side of the instituting movements, providing new insights, pushing for social justice whenever and wherever people are oppressed or excluded.

**Richard and Miren:**
Danilo, is there anything you would like to share with IJAR readers that we have forgotten about?

**Danilo:**
Just a thank you for the authors who trust their work to IJAR, and to the readers who are the raison d'être of the journal.

**Richard and Miren:**
Thanks very much Danilo, for sharing your insights with all the readers of IJAR.

## About Danilo Streck:

Danilo Streck is Doctor of Education from Rutgers University. He has been a Visiting Scholar at the Latin American Center, UCLA, and at Max Plank Institute for Human Development in Berlin. Danilo is Professor at the Graduate School of Education of the University of Caxias do Sul (Brazil). His research projects focus on popular education, Latin American pedagogy, participatory social processes and research methodologies. He is author of "A New Social Contract in a Latin American Educational Context" (Palgrave/McMillan), co-editor of "Paulo Freire Encyclopedia" (Rowman & Littlefield).

## About the Interviewers:

Miren Larrea is senior researcher in Orkestra- Basque Institute of Competitiveness and lecturer at the University of Deusto in the Basque Country, Spain. She is also associate researcher at Praxis Research Institute in Rafaela, Santa Fé, Argentina. Her research focuses on regional innovation systems, multilevel and collaborative governance, local development, and shared leadership. She is one of the proponents of action research for territorial development, practiced by a multilocal community of researchers in the Basque Country (Spain), Agder (Norway) and Santa Fé and Tierra del Fuego (Argentina).

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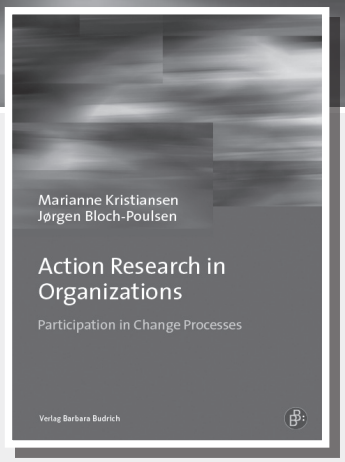


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