Action Research & Social Justice

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Defining Action Research (AR)

Taken from: *The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research* (2016)
Chapter 6: Defining Action Research: On Dialogic Spaces for Constructing Shared Meaning
*Lonnie Rowell, Margaret Riel, & Elena Polush*, (85-102)

- Epistemological and methodological plurality is an essential framework for AR, as a “self-consciously” collaborative, participative, and democratic process, and a “multidimensional strategy for social change” (Greenwald & Levin, 2007, p. 1)

- A complex history of AR is due to the broad range and academic fields and social context from which AR has emerged, including philosophy (John Dewey), labor organizing traditions, social psychology (Kurt Lewin), anthropology (Sol Tax), sociology (Orlando Fals Borda), group dynamics (Haverstock Institute), civil rights and social justice struggles (Highlander Center), and organizational change and development to name a few fields and contexts (Brydon-Miller, Greenwald, & Maguire, 2003, p. 11)

- Regarding the blending of theory and practice, Brydon-Miller (2003) asserted that many action researchers would have to admit, that they came to theory largely as a way of justifying what they knew was correct to begin with; to legitimize a politically informed and effective form of knowledge generated through experience (p. 15).

Who does Action Research? Resources?

Networks/Journals/Conferences/Universities

- Teachers, youth workers, counselors, nurses, community developers, artists, ecologists, farmers, settlement-dwellers, students, professors and intellectual-activists. It can be found on every continent and at every edge of the globe.

- **Networks**: Cross-national AR networking:
  - **CARN**: Collaborative Action Research Network: 1976
    - [https://www.carn.org.uk/](https://www.carn.org.uk/)
  - **ALARA**: Action Learning, Action Research Association: 1991
    - [https://www.alarassociation.org/](https://www.alarassociation.org/)
  - **ARNA**: Action Research Network of the Americas: 2012
    - [http://www.arnaconnect.org/](http://www.arnaconnect.org/)

  - International Journal of Action Research (Germany: Budrich 2013)
  - Education Action Research (UK: Taylor & Francis 1993)
  - Journal of Teacher Action Research (US: Chase Young 2014)

- **Conferences**: All over the world: Last ARNA Conference June 2017 Cartagena, Columbia - 2018 San Diego Participation and Democratization of Knowledge: New Convergences for Reconciliation
  - 1st Global Assembly on Knowledge Democracy

- **Universities**: Pepperdine: Center for Collaborative Action Research: [http://cadres.pepperdine.edu/ccar/](http://cadres.pepperdine.edu/ccar/)
  - University of Cincinnati: Action Research Center: [http://cech.uc.edu/centers/arc.html](http://cech.uc.edu/centers/arc.html)
New books:

1. By the Howard University faculty Dr. Kwabi-Addo:
   Health Outcomes in a Foreign Land: A Role for Epigenomic and Environmental Interaction (2017)


7. The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research (2016)

Direct Link:
Action Research: Methods

- AR is an approach to inquiry that bridges the gap between theory and practice through reflection and inquiring into the cyclical AR processes of constructing/diagnosing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action, which are central to the development of actionable knowledge (Coughlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 8-12).

- It is research with participants, rather than on participants – taking up inquiry that affects participants – is important / related to participants lives.

- Degree of participation, research, action, and reflective practices: Range from full/equal participants all stakeholder (CBAR) to negotiated levels of participation - based on context, situation, and available resources.

- Data: both generated and collected. Participants experience as data – one of the “units of analysis” of the inquiry.

- Reflection on the content, process, and premise of the project is critical to the AR cycles and learning, as reflection is the activity that integrates action and research (p. 25)

Action Research & Social Justice

• AR, “seeks to develop and maintain social and personal interactions that are nonexploitative and enhance the social and emotional lives of all people who participate” (Stringer, 2013, p. 23).

• AR is also oriented to address the negative effects of authoritarian and oppressive processes and throughout the research there is a focus on collaboration (with those directly affected by the research), engagement, power sharing, and capacity building (Stringer, 2013, pp. 17-24).


• At its ideal, it is a collaborative, democratic partnership among various stakeholders in the process of knowledge development/creation.

• Various theories of AR: Shani & Passmore (2010) attention on 4 factors:

Action Research & Power

- A key element of AR is its focus on power and to challenge premises of unfair legitimacy, authority, and meaning and seek to use power to generate justice, fairness and civil society.

- AR recognizes that power and control are a significant factor in professional, bureaucratic, and organizational life and it is an important object of the research.

- This is achieved through reflecting on the various kinds of power happening in the research, so as to develop actions that work toward thwarting reducing, or neutralizing the negative, and destructive effects of power and control.

- Without a critical analysis of power and how power is operating in a study, and its consequences /transformations - especially for participants, AR is no more than problem solving / quality improvement project.
Action Research Ethics

Action Research Principles for Acting Ethically in Organization & Workplace Inquiry

“Democratic intentions do not obviate the need for thoughtful examination of the ethical implications”

(Boser, 2006, p. 14)

1. Serve the good of the whole – do no harm to the agency and participants with an understanding of mandatory reporting requirements and related critical issues.
2. Treat others as you would like them to treat you.
3. Always treat people as ends, never as means; respect their being and never use them for their ability to do; treat people as persons and never as subjects.
4. Act so you do not increase power of more powerful stakeholders over less powerful.
5. Include ethical issues and concerns as part of researcher’s reflective journals.
6. Set up a discussion group to provide an on-going review of ethical concerns.
7. Discuss ethics and values with research partners.
8. Negotiate roles and expectations to articulate clear mechanisms for shared decision making.
9. Be prepared to alter or even stop the project if ethical issues arise that cannot be addressed by the group.
10. Develop strategies for making the results of research of direct benefit to the community.
11. Develop innovative strategies for disseminating the results of the group work.
12. Be willing to confront the troubling issues of intellectual property that attend to social science research and that must be a central concern of action researchers.
13. Make services affordable and available to community groups.

(Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Eikeland, 2006; Coughlan & Brannick, 2014; Gellerman, Frankel, & Ladenson, 1990).
Action Research in the Classroom

Learning Circles: Collaborative Knowledge Building
A learning circles is a highly interactive, participatory structure for organizing group work. The goal is to build, share, and express knowledge though a process of open dialogue and deep reflection around issues or problems with a focus on a shared outcome
Margaret Reil, 2014

• **Getting Ready** Setting the stage for Learning Circle interaction
• **Opening the Circles**: Building trust through self disclosure and dialogue
• **Planning the Set of Circle Projects**: Individual Sponsorship of Collaborative Circle Projects
• **Exchanging Work on the Projects**: Distributed Learning and Teaching through progressive problem solving
• **Sharing the Outcomes**: Publications, Exhibitions, Presentations, Websites
• **Closing the circle**: Reflective Learning

https://sites.google.com/site/onlinelearningcircles/Home/learning-circles-defined
Action Research in the Classroom

Learning Circles: Collaborative Knowledge Building

Purpose and Objectives:

• Learning Circles are used to help groups of people build their knowledge in a collaborative setting with participatory leadership.

• Learning circles blend individual leadership with collective responsibility. This is a different form of collaborative learning and it is important to understand when this structure is and is not appropriate.

• Learning circles are ideal where there is an open area of inquiry and a value on distributed learning of the participants.

• Learning Circles would not be a good choice where there is a highly specified outcome, with well defined protocols for participants to follow.

https://sites.google.com/site/onlinelearningcircles/Home/learning-circles-defined/circle-phases/getting-ready
1st Person Inquiry Learning Circle

Methods

• A group of six graduate nursing students conducted three first-person inquiry learning circles to explore the intersection of their identity and flipped learning.
• Prior to their research, students performed 12 weeks of research assistant activities on an insider action research flipped learning study in nurse practitioner student education.
• Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought provided the conceptual framework for the research.
• Using Doris Boutin’s “Identity, Research, and Health Dialogic Interview Format,” each student independently reflected on multiple aspects of their identity in relationship to flipped learning, and then compared and contrasted their reflections dialogically.
• Data was coded and analyzed using constructivist grounded theory method and thematic findings were identified.

Findings

• Four conceptual categories were identified:
  1. Flexibility related to various roles/lifestyles,
  2. Autonomy related to being in control of own learning
  3. Conscious engagement related to dispelling myths of passivity
  4. Competency related to confidence and intelligent dialogue between student and teacher.
AR: Critiques/Challenges

• It’s Not Objective – It’s Not Research!

• Focus on power - challenges unfair premises of unfair legitimacy and authority} negotiating multiple political dynamic.

• Self Reflection & Advisement: Responsible use of research power/authority: “look closely at our own practices in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions”
  (Pattie Lather, Getting Smart: Feminist Pedagogy with the Postmodern, 1991, p. 15)

• Leveling the playing field “We are all equals” Ideological construct versus attainable goal??

• Crisis of Representation: Similar challenges to anthropology and ethnography applicable to AR } Clearer explication of values and practices.

• Question of Rigor: Earlier versions AR not addressing audit trail for data generation/collection, methodological decision making within a flexible research design, data analysis and determination of findings} More often now seeing AR use of Grounded Theory Methods of data analysis: Coding/Constant Comparison/Analytic Memoing – Identifying their Audit Trail
AR: Theoretical Underpinnings/Values

• As noted by Guba & Lincoln (1994), “Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (p. 105).

• My research employs critical and feminist paradigms undergirds the: (1) ethics of the study, (2) interpretative lens of the research, (3) choice of theories and methods, and (4) the behavior of the researcher, as values only become meaningful when they are reflected in behavior:

Underlying Values of Critical and Feminist Scholarship

• Personal expertise: meaning people are knowledgeable about their own lives.
• Equality of worth of all individuals.
• Historical situatedness.
• Representation of multiple perspectives.
• The understanding of societal structures and relations for purpose of creating change where the benefits of society are more evenly distributed.
• Describing and power sharing as opposed to dividing and conquering.
• Accountability for responsible use of power.
• The power of the whole as opposed to the power of division.
• Using agreement and negotiation as a basis for interaction.
• Speaking truth to power.
• Creating a language of inclusion, empathy and respect for diverse perspectives.
• Providing friendly critique and caring critique.
• Creating practices that reflect these values, creating possibilities, creating a more just society.