

Call for papers, Special Issue of International Journal of Action Research

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Conceptualising Action Research: Basic Assumptions and Terminology in Action Research

Action research on the rise

Action research comes in many varieties. Regardless, it has for decades and under different designations, been gaining in popularity among different professions and professional studies, in management and organisation 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 creation, from having been monopolised in specialised academic institutions to becoming much more socially distributed.

However, people doing action research often seem to encounter conventional, mostly interpretive social research terminology which is still based on a principal division of labour between intellectual and manual work, knower and known, researcher and researched: more appropriate to the previous, monopolised knowledge management regime. The terminology still used in social research reflects the former division of labour however, “othering” the subjects of study, and thereby making the radical and more basic knowledge generation processes happening in certain forms of action research almost invisible, and conflated with other, inappropriate methods.

Therefore, this special issue calls for papers, which *both* 1) summarise extant attempts *and* 2) aim to develop concepts and terminology more and better adjusted to knowledge production from within practices, and to ways of conceiving and describing collaborative knowledge production in action research, as it plays out in cross-fields of tensions between various discourses and institutionalised practices, in a field filled with research and practice dilemmas. This special issue will also 3) welcome investigations of different “clashes of discourse” typically happening in action research which, from this, might develop new concepts and terminology. AR needs to find and develop a new and proactive language and practice to qualify research practice, based on the basic principles and approaches in action research.

As indicated, social or human knowledge development and creation needs to come into *its* own, find its own form (like natural science and technology might be said to have come into their own during modernity). Certain forms of action research are potent candidates for making this happen. Extant forms of inquiry all need to be critically examined, transformed, and adjusted to radically practice-based knowledge generation in action research.

Ultimately, then, the challenge is more fundamental than merely terminological. There are many terms from conventional research which may serve as starting points for reflections on

this challenge. For instance, the very term “data” entails ideas about the existence of unbiased “bits of information”, which are possible to “collect” by means of specific “data-collection” methods. This, however, carries with it logics from natural science and empiricist theory of knowledge, in which human and social phenomena like action, knowing, meaning, emotion, insight etc. escape attention and seem invisible. Hence, in this one small word “data” we see one of many signs of ingrained and institutionalised separation of social research and knowledge into the different internal disciplines of “theory”, “data” or “experience”, and “methods”, which need to be challenged.

Certain forms of practitioner action research are already challenging this. More colloquial and extant understandings of “experience” do not operate with the divisions of conventional research. They are simultaneously theoretical, empirical, and methodological, and even simultaneously descriptive and normative, thereby challenging basic categories of modern research and societies. Action research cannot continue being illegitimately marginalised. The challenge is for it to “come into its own”: conceptually and terminologically, In order to create space for action research as an accepted part of the mainstream, it needs *both* to transcend the tendency to reduce its own activity to a niche of complementary “projects” within a conventional status quo, and the expansive terminology and conceptualisation of conventional research needs critical examination and adjustment to the experience of action researchers. How do we think, write and talk appropriately about action research, developing concepts, insights and understandings from within practices, as part of an increasingly mainstreamed socially distributed knowledge-production?

Developing appropriate action research terminology and concepts must attach itself to other schools of thought, critical of the submission of social knowledge to natural science forms and concepts. An important *starting point* for developing concepts and terminology could be basic historical concepts: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. The European tradition also 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. Besides starting by connecting to established and emerging critical traditions and approaches, an interesting and promising place to start, could be to explore the different *clashes* between action research and conventional terminology, and understandings experienced by both researchers and practitioners in concrete projects.

Deadlines

Submission of extended abstract: May 15, 2021. Extended abstract: Maximum 1200 words (Including an extended outline, accounting for the content in each section).

Acceptance or rejection of extended abstract: June 15, 2021.

Submission of full article: November 15, 2021.

Review process.

Review will be sent to the authors: March 1, 2022.

Final article submitted: May 1, 2022

Expected publication: August 15 2022

Full article length: 6000–8000 words.

All communication, submission of abstracts, drafts and articles should go to Olav Eikeland and the issue editors at: oleik@online.no.