

Action research and anthroposophical research

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A definition of AR

- “ action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview.” Reason and Bradbury (2001:1)

action research: many faces; many names

- Participatory action research (PAR)
- Practitioner research
- Action science
- Collaborative action research; cooperative enquiry, community-based participatory research.
- Educative research, educational research, teacher research
- Emancipatory praxis; participatory rural appraisal,

More faces

- Feminist action research,
- Anti-racist participatory action research
- Advocacy activist and militant research

What do all these approaches have in common?

- Action research is:
- research *in* action, rather than research *about* action;
- A collaborative democratic partnership;
- Concurrent with action;
- A sequence of events and an approach to problem solving.
- (Coghlan and Brannik: 2009: 4)

Further criteria for AR (Gummesson: 2000:16)

- AR seeks to integrate theory and action-making action happen successfully and contributing theory to a body of knowledge;
- AR does not reduce complexity to analyse it but engages with complexity and celebrates it with a holistic approach;
- AR can use all kinds of data, qualitative and quantitative

Kemmis and McTaggart (1987: 6)
writing about education stress social
justice

- AR is “ a form of collective, self-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 understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.”

McCutcheon and Jung emphasise collaboration

- AR is, “ systematic enquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical and undertaken by the participants of the enquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice.” (1990:148)

Reflective practice: origins

- Origins of AR in education go back to John Locke's (1632-1704) insistence on generating knowledge through experience;
- And John Dewey's (1859-1952) emphasis on generating knowledge founded on teacher's experience;
- Donald Schön (1930- 1997) „the reflective practitioner“ „the learning society“ „reflection-in-and-on-action“, „professional learning“

Groups and individuals

- “ The approach is only AR when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that the AR of the group is achieved through the *critically examined action* of the individual group members.” (Kemmis and McTaggart: 1987)

Intervention: a paradox?

- Argyris and Schön: (1991) highlight the challenge of double task of AR:
- Improvement of practice, social change through intervention
- Research: creating valid knowledge about practice

Appreciative enquiry (Cooperrider and Srivasta (1987))

- AR does not always have to focus on problem-solving;
- Appreciative enquiry is an AR approach that builds on focusing on what is already successful, rather than on what is deficient.

Key concepts in AR Positionality

- The researcher takes up a position in a continuum of positionality:
- insider (self/practice);
- insider in collaboration with other insiders;
- insider (s) in collaboration with outsiders;
- reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams);
- outsider (s) in collaboration with insiders;
- outsider(s) studies insiders....etc (Herr and Anderson: 2005)

Knowledge interests (Habermas: 1971)

- Knowledge and human interests inseparable
- Habermas rejected objectivist claim that the only valid way of generating knowledge is empirical-analytical approach (positivist)
- Self-reflection overcomes problem of subjective bias

Following Habermas

knowledge interests require different research methodologies

- Technical knowledge (uses empirical analytic science and instrumental reason) aims to provide an explanation through empirical facts and generalisations
- Practical/communicative knowledge uses hermeneutic/interpretive methods: aims to create understanding of participants;
- Emancipatory knowledge uses critical reflective methods and action research: aim is critical reflection to understand how knowledge is constrained or distorted by power relations.

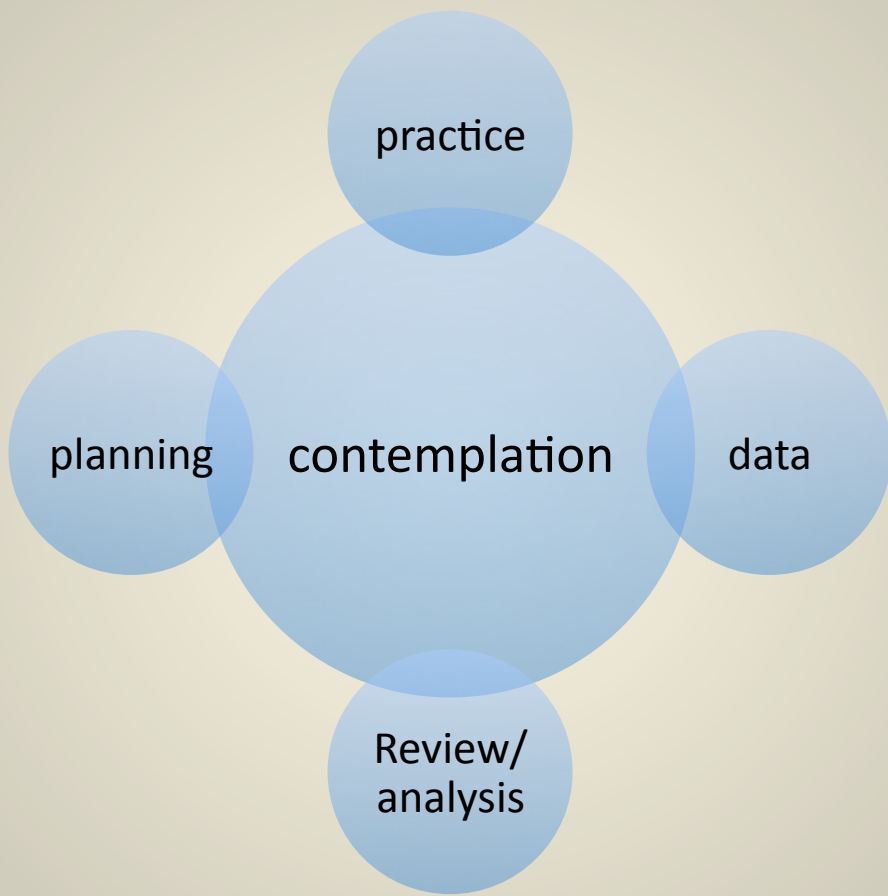
Action research in Europe

- Following 1968 there awoke interest in action/practitioner research but this ended in the 1970s with criticism of its validity (e.g. Hurrelmann: 1977).
- Since then only Altrichter/Posch (1997, 2007), Moser, H. and Ornauer(1977) have promoted this.
- Widely considered unscientific, used only for evaluation and school quality processes.

Reflective practice/reflective
practitioner research little known in
European social and educational
research

very little literature on action/
participatory/practitioner/teacher





practice

planning

contemplation

data

Review/
analysis

contemplation

- Visualising
- Image building
- Leading thought/words/motif
- Letting go
- Forgetting

Anthroposophical research

- Based on Steiner's theory of knowledge which builds on Goethe's world view.
- Steiner posited in his key works: Theory of Knowledge and Philosophy of Freedom
- He developed a method of research for teachers called meditatively generated knowledge of developing human being (1920)

Steiner's Theory of Knowledge

- Knowledge has 2 sources: perception through senses (or memory) and thinking (idea)
- Perception is subjective; idea/ concept is self-evident and objective
- Idea/concept is spiritual
- Human being is not passive observer but active co-creator of the world through process of knowledge

Steiner:

Generating intuitive knowledge

- Research question in practice
- Observation, data collection in practice
- Contemplative inquiry (Zajonc: 2009)
- cognitive breathing- enhanced inner focus on image- cognitive outbreathing- letting go- Zen
- This process can lead to intuitive knowledge in practice- a form of knowing-in-practice (Lave and Wenger (1991))

Four types of knowledge

- Knowledge based on observation
- Knowledge based on self-development, self-transformation and capacity building
- Participatory knowledge: knowing-in-practice-intuition
- Contextualised knowledge in a learning community

Knowing-in-practice in learning communities

- Professional learning through knowing-in-practice (Kelly:2006)
- Knowledge in and of practice always situative and in context (Kelly: 2006)
- Professional (teacher)learning is process of movement from novice to expert in context (Kelly. 2006)
- Knowledge exists not only in individual but in learning communities (Wells: 2000)

Validity of anthroposophical action research

- Depends on:
- Reflexivity: epistemology and ontology of methods: grounded theory
- Positionality: insider-outsider
- Criticality: data and texts read critically
- Critical reflective practice: self-observation (research journal and critical friend)
- And the validated within a community of learners being critically reflective.

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