How are Action Researchers Contributing to Knowledge Democracy? A Global Perspective

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Introduction

Action research is internationally accepted for its transformational potential in many disciplines and contexts, perhaps the reason why so many different genres have emerged. However, the common aim across the varying approaches to action research is that it has an educative intent (McTaggart, Nixon & Kemmis, 2017, p. 23), enabling those who wish to change their own social circumstances to learn how to generate knowledge that is culturally relevant, and can be applied to improve their quality of life. The process of action research is a democratising one, as those engaged ask critical questions about their own lived reality and practices, transform their own thinking and behaviour and evaluate the effect of their changed practice/behaviour to ultimately generate their own living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 1989). A living-educational-theory is an individual's explanation for their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations. Action research is thus inherently political, since it aims to change existing social norms and structures that perpetuate inequalities through the creation of spaces where people can iteratively reflect, plan and act on their 'sayings, doings and relatings' (McTaggart et al., 2017, p. 17) to allow them to make positive changes on individual, group and systemic levels. As such, action research challenges the knowledge monopoly of the academy, and particularly the Western academy which has colonized the thinking of most of the world.

Yet, although action research is touted as a suitable way to contribute to the decolonization and democratisation of knowledge, it is often adapted and distorted to fit within traditional understandings of academic research and change processes, so that it becomes no more transformational than traditional, positivist forms of knowledge production. Although several pioneering research publications have taken us in the direction of democratic research (see for example, Chilisa, 2011; Cairns & Harney, 2014; Cram & Mertens, 2016; Del Pino, Jones, Forge, Martins, Morris, & Wolf et al., 2016; Mertens, 2008; Smith, 2015), Masalam, Kapoor and Jordan (2016, p. 343) critique the 'co-option' of participatory action research by the academy and large neo-liberal agencies/nonprofit organizations "in the interests of reproducing western capitalist modernity, through an ahistoricizing, depoliticizing and technicist version of PAR in service of dominant western capitalist ruling class relations." Thus the 'methodology of margins' (Jordan, 2009, p. 18) runs the danger of morphing into yet another tool to sustain the epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2014) of indigenous ways of knowing. Such scathing commentary makes it imperative that action researchers begin to ask critical questions of themselves and their intent, to prevent the process from further entrenching the colonial project, rather than fostering redress through the democratisation of knowledge. This type of thinking also gave birth to the idea of convening a global debate on the issue of knowledge democracy.

We think that action researchers must ask themselves critical questions regarding how their practices promote or constrain the democratization of knowledge. Such questions force action researchers to accept responsibility for placing the 'I' at the heart of their enquiries and holding themselves to account for living their values as fully as possible. As academic researchers we three authors have all written extensively about action research, have presented many workshops and worked with numerous students to promote a critical understanding of AR in both the global north and south. Still, we see published many

examples of watered-down, technically oriented studies which masquerade as action research but are really no more than traditional objective forms of research conducted on people, rather than in authentic partnership. The question at the heart of this paper is, 'How can we, as action researchers, work *with* participants in ways that are contextually and culturally relevant, and generate knowledge that enables people to take control of improving their own lives as they see fit?' Our use of 'we' in the question stresses the importance of working and researching together, whilst protecting the integrity of each individual 'I'. We are researching together to enhance the influence of our enquiries in contributing to making the world a better place to be, with values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. We are doing this with a focus on contributing to knowledge-democracy from a global perspective, and it is for this reason that we agreed to convene and coordinate global participatory workshops prior to the first Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy, held in Cartagena, Columbia in June 2017. We use the term 'global' with full acknowledgement that the data presented in this paper, although derived from various continents, only represents limited views on the subject. We will now give some background to explain the purpose and context of these workshops.

Mobilizing Knowledge for the first Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy
In 2017, the first Global Assembly for Knowledge Democracy was launched under the leadership of Lonnie Rowell from the Action Research Network of the Americas to:

> … create a socio-political and culturally diverse space within which concerned
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> people from various parts of the world can meet as a kind of alternative "think
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> tank" that helps point the way towards innovative solutions to global crisis
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> issues by drawing from the wellsprings of knowledge democracy and our shared
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> human capacity to listen to one another. We are interested in the generation of
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> dialogue at the intersections of networks of action researchers, people involved

in various participatory forms of analysis and action, and activists working

diligently to create an alternative globalization

(www.knowledgedemocracy.org).

To help delegates to prepare for the June assembly and ensure that as many voices as

possible were included in the discussion, a call was issued to invite regional networks of

action researchers to run workshops convened around the question:

To what extent can epistemological, ideological and political differences be reconciled in the

interest of a sustainable and socially just world?

It was suggested that, out of their discussions, they develop concept papers on

knowledge democracy and related issues of decolonization and globalization. These papers

were then posted on the website for others to engage with before, during and after the

Assembly. We provided some rationale on the need for engaging with the topic of knowledge

democracy and some guidelines on how they might do so as explained on the website by

Rowell, Edwards-Groves and Ramos (2016) (see http://arnawebsite.org/wp-

content/uploads/2017/04/KMb_Brief_June2016.pdf.)   The following section is taken from

this site.

What is Knowledge Democracy and Why Do We Need to Discuss it?
De Sousa Santos (2008, p. xxxiv) calls for discussion around the "geopolitics of

knowledge, its eagerness to problematize the equation of who produces knowledge, in

what context, and for whom." Thus, the 1st Global Assembly is being organized with

the intention of initiating a thoughtful and strategic assessment of the politics of

knowledge creation and the potential of participatory approaches as alternatives to a

monolithic knowledge enterprise based on the domination of the Global North and the

marginalization and subordination of other knowledges. According to Hall and Tandon (2015) (http://www.politicsofevidence.ca/349/) democratising knowledge means acknowledging the different ways of knowing and their value in different contexts; valuing the various ways to create and represent knowledge (not just text based); and understanding that knowledge is 'a powerful tool for taking action to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world.'

What would a Regional Workshop Entail?

The format of each workshop will of course differ, depending on the context. It could be done in person, or virtually. However, we imagine that scholars in various fields (and not just action researchers) could dialogue around questions such as, but not only:

- *What knowledge ecologies are appropriate/recognized for our context? And why?*
- *How can we (do we) address the democratisation of knowledge within our teaching and research?*
- *What are the political and pragmatic implications of knowledge democratisation? What principles/philosophies might inform them?*
- *What research methodologies might advance such knowledge?*

What might the Outputs of Such a Workshop Look Like?

Ideally, apart from the individual papers that attendees might like to submit in response to the envisaged call for publications, each region could compile a composite paper to feed into the Assembly. The format of this paper could be text-based or some form of digitalized visual representation of the thinking of the participants.

Method

The findings were derived from a thematic analysis of the narrative reports posted on the website. We realized at this point that, even in wishing to embrace the idea of knowledge democracy, the paradox is that we were only able to analyse the reports written in English. We thus had to exclude ideas from one workshop held in Mexico, one in Columbia and one in Francophone West Africa. In addition, a visual summary from a group in Ireland was illegible, which means that this analysis is in fact incomplete – and is thus more skewed towards contributions from the global north, which in itself has implications for the democratisation and decolonization of knowledge. Table 1 gives an overview of the different workshop reports we were able to include in the analysis:

[t]Table 1 near here[/t].

All of the workshops either explored the suggested questions directly, or participants formulated similar ones of their own. We thus decided to use them to frame the content analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) which was conducted by the three authors independently, before they came to a consensus on a final version. Since we were working with secondary data, which the workshop conveners had posted on the website for anyone to read or use, ethical clearance was not necessary (Tripathy, 2013), but we did ask for permission from each compiler of the reports to include them in this analysis (three of the reports had in fact been written by authors of this paper since they were also the conveners of the workshops). An initial analysis of the reports was compiled, and posted on the conference site (https://knowledgedemocracy.org/2017/06/13/initial-analysis-of-some-of-the-participatory-workshops/), so that all participants could read it, add to it, or challenge its inferences. To date, over a year later, no-one has made comment on it.

Global Perceptions of Action Research for the Promotion of Knowledge Democracy

We now present a discussion of the themes that emerged from the analysis of the seven reports against the backdrop of existing literature around action research and knowledge democracy and our own critical insights as organizers of and participants in the Global Assembly. As indicated, we used the guiding questions as an analytical framework and draw out key issues raised and, where relevant, significant similarities and differences.

What Knowledge Ecologies are Appropriate/Recognized for Our Context? And Why?

In developing our shared understandings of knowledge ecologies we draw on de Sousa Santos' (2017) idea that an ecology of knowledges is a way of holding diversity in knowledge that supports the growth and integrity of the whole. An ecology of knowledges gives us the opportunity to forge a new field of coherences in recognizing the value of, but moving beyond, scientific materialist empiricism. As different knowledge systems interact, they can learn from these interplays. Instead of disintegration between competing reality claims, an ecology of knowledges leads to new possibilities of integration. The name for this new orientation is Knowledge Democracy.

What was evident, however, from the reports is that Euro-USA-centric forms of knowledge are still the norm in both the global North and South; that they are equated with 'scientific knowledge', whilst local knowledge is denigrated, silenced and ignored. What we mean by 'local' knowledge is the embodied knowledge of the community and academic researchers as they enquire into improving their practice, within particular and well defined sites of action.

Although there was a strong rhetoric about the need to value the voice of students and community and what they bring to the table, most participants complained of the difficulty of actually doing this while working within neo-liberal, patriarchal and colonized systems. There was general agreement that we need to move away from the idea of the Western-Indigenous knowledge polemic and begin to educate towards an understanding of the value of embracing an ecology of knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2015), which can help us to find solutions to the social issues that beset us in our various contexts. As Fataar (2017) suggested, unless we challenge the idea that knowledge can be separated from the knower and encourage people to accept responsibility for creating their own knowledge, we will continue to be colonized, even if the skin colour of the colonizer changes. Promoting one particular type of knowledge can disconnect people, often along social and financial lines. One group noted that the super-rich and powerful seemed to exist as a global community, but were disconnected from the poor in their own countries. Specifically, the complex and paradoxical matter of elite academics initiating a discussion on knowledge democracy is one which is an ongoing challenge. Vital, and uncomfortable questions for addressing this paradox were seen as a starting point e.g.:

> When we, as academics/privileged benefit from the status quo, how easy is it for
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> us to potentially disrupt that? What needs to change in academia for us to be
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> able to lead such processes?

This raises the concept of leadership, suggesting that structures and processes, as well as epistemic dispositions, need to enable more democratic leadership practices to emerge, where the voice of the less powerful is empowered to speak, and contribute to change. Society is not homogenous, therefore how can we expect a homogenous knowledge system to help us solve the problems we face? Across the board, there was agreement that knowledge should be presented as open-ended, in need of questioning; transdisciplinary work is essential

to widen horizons; and relational ways of being should supplant the current focus on 'doing'. Seeing the process of understanding as a relational activity, drawing on 'I~we~I' i~we~i' and Ubuntu allows us to act in a way that connects us, promotes reflexivity and enables us to be co-creative.

The work has indeed begun. Examples of how researchers are attempting to develop an understanding of the importance of these ideas include some of the following: Delong (2017) shows how different knowledge systems can learn from such interplays whilst respecting and legitimating the embodied knowledge of practitioners in contexts of power struggles and in school and medical systems:

> …it seems that the universities were (and mostly still are) intent on 'epistemicide' (de Sousa Santos, 2014): the murder of the knowledge of the practitioner- researchers as they create their own living-theories. Confronting the rejection of their voices and the constraints that I strained against for the sake of my students, I was attempting, 'to remain the writer of [my] own story' (Gawande, 2014, p. 141) so that they could remain the writers of their own stories. I do, however, want to recognize that a small number of professionals and institutions are expanding practitioner-researchers' choices in the name of living a worthwhile life. (p. 51)

Gumede (2017) shares his journey as a black, African Zulu educator, drawing on his indigenous knowledge.

> I look at the incommensurability between cultures, i.e. the oral versus the literate, and seek to demonstrate how the differences in culture can be seen as a development of new epistemologies. I discuss some of the influences of cultural translation

(Whitehead, 2016, p. 91, after de Sousa Santos, 2014) and the links to be made between cultural perspectives. (p.1)

Gumede draws on the indigenous language of isiZulu to emphasise the importance of an oralate culture in knowledge-construction.

Boland and Demirbag (2017) explore Honolulu teachers' exploration of place, drawing on an indigenous understanding of the spiritual way of being of 'Aloha':

Jocelyn: The values I bring to my work come from being raised in an ethnically diverse community and in a mixed-race family on Maui, alongside the Hawaiian culture (Demirbag, 2015; Alencastre, Demirbag, Hattori, Ikeda, & Kahumoku, 2017). My parents emphasised being friends with everyone, accepting all creeds and colours. In this diverse and inclusive environment, I adopted aspects of many cultures, including speaking Hawaiian Creole English, a literal melting pot of words. Looking back, I can see that what was advocated was really the aloha spirit – a warmth, acceptance, and inclusion extended to everyone. In addition, the Hawaiian cultural belief that the land is alive with spirit was one that eventually connected me intimately to the cosmos and then led me to anthroposophy, the philosophy which stands behind Waldorf schools. (p.21)

The work of Delong, Gumede and Boland and Demirbag help to answer the question: "When we, as academics / privileged benefit from status quo, how easy is it for us to potentially disrupt that? What needs to change in academia for us to be able to lead such processes? " These authors all point to the limitations of traditional forms of academic writing to communicate the embodied expressions of the energy-flowing values that

constitute their explanatory principles in explanations of educational influence. We academics can disrupt the traditional epistemologies by bringing these different forms of explanatory principles into the Academy for academic legitimation.

How can We (do We) Address the Democratisation of Knowledge within Our Teaching and Research?

Some responses related to the processes and procedures that can enable access to education, the articulation of voice, and emergence of skills and qualities in less 'powerful' groups such as students, youth groups, and those with limited access to formal learning. Virtual and face-to-face educational initiatives based on the action research principles of dialogue and democratic, and democratising, processes enable the valuing of multiple voices and perspectives, and provide a space in which the status quo can be held up to scrutiny, questioned, disrupted and challenged. However, for many academics, this form of research is not valued by their institution, and therefore not encouraged or institutionally supported. Further, many academics who may themselves use action research to review and improve their own work, are subject to more positivistic 'improvement' processes in the academy. Such competing agenda, and the strength of the dominant (positivistic) voice may at times make a more democratising approach difficult within formal institutions.

Nevertheless, many were able to enact practices that disrupted the 'transmission' model of learning, enabling school students, for example, to not only contribute data to research, but to engage with the analyses of that data, explain their analyses, and so create their own knowledge. For schools to do this, a shift in relation to the curriculum model is needed, to enable more hybridised, personalised models of learning and knowledge generation. It is interesting that Finland has mooted a curriculum aimed at doing just this (see http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/finland-schools-subjects-are-out-and-topics-are-in-as-country-reforms-its-education-system-10123911.html). From the age of 16

school pupils will be tasked with exploring phenomena of their choosing from various disciplinary perspectives to enable a pluralistic understanding of the world, rather than learning unrelated facts within respective subjects. Of course, this move to promote character, independent learning, resilience and communication skills, rather than prepare learners for subject-specific examinations, has been questioned by many who wish to retain the status quo, but it does indicate a recognition of the need for change in what and how knowledge is generated within our education systems. Freire's humanizing pedagogy (del Carmen Salazar, 2013) was mooted as a good starting point which takes peoples' personal experiences as a valued and valuable starting point.

Underpinning such process and procedural changes, fundamental and disruptive epistemic strategies need to be employed. Intersubjectivity and dialogic processes, leading to anti-oppressive (see, for example, Kumashiro, 2000) and critical pedagogies were seen to support the successful implementation of participatory structures.   However, the need for personal reflection, and a recognition of one's personal history as a contributor to the current situation, are key in enabling a decolonizing process.   One example was presented of how Moira Laidlaw has done this in her teaching and research in a paper in Educational Action Research on 'The Democratising Potential of Dialogical Focus in an Action Enquiry' see: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0965079940020207?needAccess=true.

Another suggestion to promote knowledge democracy was to connect with philosophers, sociologists and others within the field, which resonates with what Lonnie Rowell proposed in his rationale for the Global Assembly:

> There could be, over time, rich connections between the AR communities and
> others in the knowledge democracy space that will enrich many sides in the
> work of transforming knowledge-power. These connections reflect what
> Orlando Fals Borda addressed as 'participatory convergence' at the 1997 World

Conference for Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time (www.knowledgedemocracy.org)

One way the group in South Africa did this was to link the idea of knowledge democracy with the concept of decolonisation of knowledge, which is a 'hot' topic currently in Higher Education. They invited a leading scholar and philosopher, Aslam Fataar, to address the group which attracted many more participants than just those that advocated and practised action research.

Most of the groups recognised the need to form communities of practice that could serve to strengthen and promote teaching and research for the democratisation of knowledge. The Mongolian group went so far as to stipulate resolutions to develop capacity within their institution by meeting regularly as action researchers: to share their learning and teaching experiences of action research; to develop a vocabulary in the Mongolian language to promote discourse about AR; to gather Mongolian case studies to show how AR is being used to democratise knowledge; and to strive to publish on all their learning. The virtual workshop organised by Whitehead included multi-screen SKYPE participations and living-posters from educational researchers who used a variety of methodologies in their contexts in different countries including Japan, South Africa, Canada, Columbia, India, Australia, China, Albania, Croatia, Ireland and the UK. This is an innovative way to engage with scholars all over the world at little cost and effort on not only a cognitive, but also relational level. The recognition of the need to improve our practices in pursuit of knowledge democracy brought with it many implications for research and teaching.

What are the Political and Pragmatic Implications of Knowledge Democratisation?
What Principles/Philosophies might Inform Them?

This was perhaps the richest section of the reports. It was also broad in scope, covering issues that had been touched on elsewhere. In this way, it was perhaps the most synoptic of the workshop elements. There was a clear articulation in all reports that hierarchical structures act to control in many and complex ways. In formal institutions, this control is also exercised in relation to whose voice can be heard, and whose knowledge can be valued. The prescription of a formal (and required) educational curriculum is a form of colonizing knowledge, but one which many practitioners feel powerless to fight. This process leads to a knowledge articulation based on exclusion and marginalisation. Further, shifting political power structures can redefine curricula, thus causing further difficulty. The dominant discourses are reproduced through education, media, legal and other structures, thus normalising at many levels, certain forms of knowledge. Disrupting these dominant and exclusion-based discourses has both practical and philosophical implications.

If we want to enable the troubling of epistemologies, it implies we have to explicitly teach the skills of critique and disruptive questioning, and this will prove challenging for teachers at all levels, who may themselves be a product of non-democratic curricula, and find themselves lacking either the knowledge or pedagogical skills to provide such teaching spaces or challenge epistemic relations within the political systems that govern education. It was pointed out that there is a need to decolonize accepted versions of history, but how can we do this without first interrogating our own histories and privilege? Discussions of knowledge are also discussions of power and politics, of self and other, of have and have-not; teachers may not see themselves as political actors, and as such, will need support of colleagues and others to enable their own dialogic processes to happen. For many, this may mean the discovery/acceptance of alternative world-views, and a personal journey of

discovery which may be a difficult one. If the goal of knowledge democratisation is decolonizing in its broadest sense (thus addressing issues of gender, race, sexuality, religion etc.), then the process is likely to be multi-layered, and multi-faceted. Transformation requires us to engage self/others, teachers/students at all levels in institutions and groups, to reflect critically and write auto/ethnographically and use other innovative ways to build knowledge and develop awareness about embodied values of practice. At a systems level, space for dialogue and reflection can be provided. There can be practical challenges in this, but more importantly, there is a real issue about the actual operation of this. Many questions were raised within the groups about the role of discipline-specific knowledge and how this fits into the idea of knowledge democracy, indicating the need for more work in this area.

While there are actions that can be taken (and increasingly, are) at grass-roots level, there is also a need for policy-makers to change practice to decolonize knowledge and recognize and value it in its various ecologies. This is particularly important in an increasingly neoliberal world agenda (Jones & O'Donnell, 2017) where education and public service are progressively commercialised and commodified. This agenda undermines democratising attempts while simultaneously engendering fear in practitioners. The threat of job and other opportunity losses make risk-taking difficult. The experience of 'administrative' bullying was seen as a managerialist control mechanism, resulting in multi-layered power struggles, and the systemic reinforcement (and by implication replication) of the status quo. Performativity measures, increasingly based on positivistic measures and indicators act as both action-control measures, and also as thought-control. Over time, the language of performativity overtakes the language of education and knowledge, thus shutting down channels of 'troubling' conversations and dialogues. This leads to the increasing normalisation of a particular hegemony, and the erosion of other voices, and the value that we place on them. This raises the question of how we who have to work within the system can

find ways to change it, without jeopardizing our own careers and interests. This relates to the necessity of having the courage to embody democratic values. We recognise the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences of economic globalisation. Global colonial capitalism are limiting and hegemonic material structures that constrain possibilities for knowledge democracy in educational action research. Our response is to emphasise the necessity of holding oneself accountabe for living as fully as possibly the values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. In doing this we identify with what Ignatieff (2017) refers to as "The Ordinary Virtues'":

> I am joining all those – the development economists, for example – who say that good institutions matter, but I am saying they matter because they empower the virtues that are essential both to the cohesion of these societies and to the survival of the institutions themselves. In a world divided between authoritarian capitalist regimes and liberal democratic ones, believers in liberal freedom should worry not whether their regime can prevail in competition with authoritarian ones, but whether they can prevail against their own forms of institutional entropy: elite capture, corruption and inequality. (p.120)

We also understand the dangers of decoupling control over knowledge production, legitimation and distribution from control over economic production and distribution. We are three academics whose economic livelihoods are dependent on our knowledge production, legitimation and distribution. Our knowledge generation is held accountable within an economic framework that judges this output in relation to the capitalist interests that control global economic production and distribution. What we are doing, whilst working under these constraints, is to open up the procedures for legitimating knowledge to the multiple epistemologies in global social movement of educational action researchers.

De Sousa Santos' focus on justice against epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Whitehead, 2016) implies that knowledge democratisation involves going further than merely analysing epistemicide, as the 'killing off' of indigenous knowledges by the dominant epistemology of Western Academies. The central principle in developing knowledge democratisation is for individual researchers to accept the responsibility of working together to hold themselves and each other to account for living as fully as possible the values and understandings that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity. These values have unique expression in an individual's practice. They form the explanatory principles of each participant in their explanations of educational influence. These explanations are our individual living-theories (Whitehead, 1989). The pragmatic implications include the necessity of gaining academic accreditation for the knowledge-created by practitioner-researchers. This involves an engagement with the power relations that are sustaining the dominant epistemology. Pragmatic implications involve engagements with, and analyses of, these power relations for the growth of educational knowledge. Many academics have successfully begun to do this and are sharing their knowledge in open access format (see, for example, http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jwgek93.htm). It was emphasized that the principles and philosophies that inform the political and pragmatic implications of knowledge democratisation will have to engage with a naturally inclusive logic for environmental and educational accountability (http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/arjwdialtoIncl061109.pdf). This leads us to the last question of which practices might help us to do this?

What Research Methodologies might Advance such Knowledge?
The current dominant research methodologies and pedagogies have been shaped by Western thinking and colonial constructions. There is thus a need to start thinking 'out of the box' and develop methodologies that suit our respective contexts and allow for forms of representation

and knowledge sources other than text – literature, drama, poetry, art for example provide rich archives of indigenous knowledge. De Sousa Santos (2014) warns us that we cannot use methodologies developed as part of the project of Western modernity to solve problems created by modernity – such understandings of social science are in fact the problem. In our desire to avoid hegemonic impositions of the emergent thematics we are stressing the importance of methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001). This enables insights from critical ethnography, indigenous methodologies, autoethnography, phenomenology, action research, living theory research and other research approaches to be integrated within the individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning:

> More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage of practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care…" (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 169).

The different reports highlight the importance of using insights from a wide range of methodologies that are useful in making contributions to knowledge democracy and an ecology of knowledges. These included insights from Phenomenology, Ethnography, Narrative Research, Case Study, Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2007), Autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), Living Theory Research (Whitehead, 1989) and Action Research (Rowell, Bruce, Shosh, & Riel, 2016). Insights from phenomenology stress the importance of starting from within the experience of the phenomena that the research is seeking to understand and improve. Ethnography stresses the importance of cultural influences. Autoethnography stresses the importance of understanding the cultural influences in the individual's practice

and understandings. Narrative Inquiry highlights the importance of recognizing research accounts as the stories of the educational influences in learning of individual practitioner-researchers. Action Research stresses the importance of engaging in systematic inquiries with action-reflection cycles and of using rigorous procedures of validation for justifying claims to knowledge. Living Theory research emphasises the importance of clarifying the meanings of the ontological and relational values that are used by practitioner-researchers in their explanations of educational influence. Grounded Theory similarly stresses the importance of traditional forms of generalisability in a general explanation is shaped by the contributions of a large number of participants.

Conclusion

Reflecting on our main question: 'How can we, as action researchers, work in ways that are contextually and culturally relevant, and generate knowledge that enables people to take control of improving their own lives as they see fit?', we conclude that answers will only emerge when we continue to ask ourselves critical questions. We cannot present any conclusive answers, and we are not sure that we should aim to do so (since that might lead to colonization of knowledge), but we are able to report that a range of common issues has emerged from reflection on the reports as discussed above. We summarise these as follows:

1. The concept and nature of knowledge itself is complex, and warrants further consideration.

2. The role and use/abuse of knowledge in society is similarly complex.

3. There is a very real question around the concept of knowledge democratisation – can this be initiated from a position of privilege?

4. Do we, and indeed can we, value and respect all perspectives? Are there times/situations where this might not be possible or even desirable? What is the status of discipline specific knowledge?

5. The hegemonic nature of dominant discourses is difficult to challenge, even from positions of power. This is especially so in an increasingly neo-liberal world. How might academia partner with grass-roots movements to develop a stronger voice and influence?

6. There was a clear articulation of various forms of action research as a means of democratising knowledge – there was little about sharing and dissemination strategies for research outputs. This is important given the publication agenda for academics. What ways do academics share their knowledge? What ways could they?

It was evident that we face the same issues in both the global north and south, and that there is much work still to be done to ensure that we, as action researchers, do not become colonized by the systems we work in, but continue to hold ourselves accountable to engaging in transformative forms of practice that help to emancipate, rather than subjugate. This analysis has allowed us to identify some critical questions that could guide us in our work to ensure that action research indeed remains the 'methodology of margins' (Jordan, 2009, p. 18).

As we look ahead we shall continue to support the strengthening of alliances between action research organisations such as the Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA), the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) and the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA). We intend to continue our collaborative inquiries into creating our living legacies for transforming social change in global educational conferences and publications.

We have already mentioned the paradox that in wishing to embrace the idea of knowledge democracy, we were only able to analyse the reports written in English. This has skewed our analysis towards contributions from the global north, which in itself has implications for the democratisation and decolonization of knowledge. We would have liked ideally to include more ideas from Spanish or Portuguese authors as we are aware that there is much research in Latin America about work with indigenous communities that provides new insights into more democratic forms of knowledge construction. Being aware of the importance of de Sousa Santos' (2014) ideas of the sociology of absences, helps us to bear in mind the potential colonization of our use of English as our sole language of communication. The translations offered at the Global Assembly in 2017 go some way towards including other languages, but we recognise this issue as a priority in including other languages in the global venues that are addressing 'knowledge democracy' and 'action research'.

With regard to our own positions as privileged academics, we accept Foucault's (1977) distinction between the 'specific intellectual' as opposed to the 'universal intellectual'. Foucault says that for a long period the 'left' intellectual was a champion of truth and justice. The universal intellectual was a spokesperson of the universal in the sense of moral, theoretical and political choices. In opposition to the universal intellectual, he describes the specific intellectual in terms of an engagement in a struggle at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them. Foucault takes care to emphasise that by 'truth' he does not mean "*the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted*". By 'truth', he means the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true. The struggles 'around truth' are not 'on behalf' of the truth, but about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. We see ourselves as specific intellectuals who recognise limitations in the logic and language

used in Western Academies to accredit what counts as educational knowledge. We are seeking to transcend these limitations by offering a global perspective on the generation of educational knowledge by individuals and groups who are explaining their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of social formations with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

In seeking to publish this paper in Educational Action Research (EAR) we are also aware that the publications in print-based journals, that are used to judge the quality of research in most countries in the world, are contributing to the epistemicide described by de Sousa Santos (2014). The language and logic of the propositional discourses in such journals, omit the digital visual data that could be used to communicate the meanings of the expressions of the embodied knowledges of indigenous and other practitioner-researchers. There is clearly much work to be done in opening digital, multi-media forums for the clarification and communication of the embodied knowledges of practitioner-researchers around the world.

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