

Title: “To Know is Not Enough”: Action Research as the Core of Educational Research

Abstract:

Each of the papers engages with a different aspect of the meaning of knowledge and connects that conception with implications for action. Paper 1 addresses the specific kind of theory generated with the research is directed towards improvement, rather than knowledge generation alone. Paper 2 highlights knowledge as a social practice – the action often requires a form of “unlearning”. Paper 3 focuses on the constraints of the neo-liberal political context on social justice action. Paper 4 argues that knowledge capable of generating more just practice requires an ethics that acknowledges power relations. Taken together, these papers invite participants into discussions of the ways in which in which action research can address educational issues in the national and global context.

Session Summary:

Objectives

This session will invite dialogue around the central issue of action research as a methodology which from its beginnings over a century past has engaged with the connections between social and education research and changes in social practices. Action research does not simply promote the use of research produced outside the educational context – it embodies a synergy between research and practice. It does not solely promote academic-based research-into-practice, but rather engages educators in their own research. It highlights the knowledge claims of practitioners, but also embodies a direct relationship between research and change. "The use of research" means not the content/outcomes of traditional and even "new" forms of research translated into practice, but rather the idea that research and teaching are interconnected. The history of action research highlights this longstanding tradition of seeing teachers as researchers.

Overview

Each of the papers engages with a different aspect of the issue of moving beyond “knowing” into “doing”. Each begins with the meaning of knowledge and connects that exploration with the implications for action. Paper 1 addresses the specific kind of theory generated with the research is directed towards improvement, rather than knowledge generation alone. Paper 2 highlights knowledge as a social practice – the action often requires a form of “unlearning”. Paper 3 focuses on the constraints of the neo-liberal political context on social justice action. Finally, paper 4 argues that knowledge capable of generating more just practice requires an ethics that acknowledges power relations. Taken together, these papers will invite participants into discussion of the ways in which in which action research can address educational issues in the national and global context.

Scholarly or scientific significance:

Each of the papers emanates from a different context and uses a different method, showing the diverse traditions of action research. Each uses a distinct theoretical perspective to examine the nature of knowing and being able to enact new social practices. The rich grounding in empirical

studies allows the complexity of the principle “To know is not enough” as directly related to praxis – the integration of theory and practice towards moral and political action.

Structure of the session

The session is envisioned as a traditional paper session, but with each speaker held accountable to very short, engaging problem-posing introductions to their work. The goal is to include ample opportunity for participants from the SIG to respond – to see in what ways their experiences resonate (and don't) with the presenters.

Presenter 1

To Know Is Not Enough, Or Is It?

1. Objectives/Purposes

The purposes of this presentation include a questioning of the assertion ‘To Know Is Not Enough’. It will be argued that propositional and dialectical forms of educational knowledge are not enough in the sense that these forms of knowing do not necessitate an engagement with improving practice. It will be argued that the generation of living educational theories with a grounding in inclusional forms of awareness necessarily engage with improving practice in enquiries of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’.

2. Perspective(s)

The presentation accepts McTaggart's (1992) perspective about the need to go beyond the devaluation and de-moralisation of economic rationality. It offers an action research approach that carries hope in transcending these constraints. It also accepts Noffke's perspective about the need to address social issues in terms of the interconnections between personal identity and the claim of experiential knowledge, as well as power and privilege in society (1997, p. 329). It is grounded in Polanyi's (1958) perspective about personal knowledge and responsibility. The presentation builds on Rayner's (2009, 2011) perspective of inclusionality with his reasoning as to why self-identity naturally includes neighbourhood.

3. Methods and Modes of Enquiry

The methods include the use of action reflection cycles, the use of Habermas' (1976, pp. 1-2) four criteria of social validity in validation groups and empathic resonance using visual narratives for clarifying the meanings of energy-flowing and embodied values as explanatory principles. The modes of enquiry are focused on explorations of the practical and theoretical implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ (Whitehead, 2009).

4. Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials

These include some 40 living theory doctoral theses and masters dissertations that have been

legitimated in Universities in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Canada and Australia over the past 15 years. Their evidence-based explanations have satisfied internal and external examiners as to their originality, critical judgment and critical evaluations of the ideas of others.

5. Results

The results are focused on Ball's and Tyson's (2011) request for suggestions to fulfill the second part of the mission of AERA. That is, to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good. The results show that the knowing of **educational** action researchers, which draws insights from the theories of **education** researchers, is both necessary and sufficient to fulfill the AERA mission.

6. Scholarly significance

The significance of the study can be understood as an original response to Schön's (1995) call for a new epistemology for the new scholarship. The living standards of judgment for this epistemology are formed from the energy-flowing values that educational action researchers have used as explanatory principles in explanations of their educational influences in learning in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

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Melissa L.; Fitzgerald, Linda M. (Eds.) (2009) Research Methods for the Self-study of Practice. Dordrecht; Springer.

Presenter 2

Unlearning what you know:
A narrative analysis of university and school teacher reflective journals

This paper reports on action research in a postgraduate course focused on understanding and developing approaches to creative learning. The paper argues for 'unlearning' as integral to the knowledge-building/mobilisation practices of both university and school teacher 'students'.

The paper holds that knowledge is a practice which is always in formation in particular places, spaces and times. It focuses on knowledge (re)production, rather than seeing knowledge as a static 'thing' to which new 'things' can be added (Popkewitz 1991). It is situated within action research traditions which produce knowledge and action together – as praxis and practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). It is in conversation with the literatures that focus on action research as a key mode of professional knowledge production and teacher learning (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 2007; Elliott, 1991; Mertler, 2009)

Action research mobilises cycles of reconnaissance, action and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). This paper constitutes a formal reflection from the university teacher.

The course 'Understanding Creative Learning' was offered to 14 teachers in an urban secondary school with a designated status of 'national school of creativity', one of 57 such schools in England. Throughout the course both school teacher 'students' and university teacher kept reflective journals. All 15 journals have been subject to narrative analysis (Reissman, 1994) by the university teacher to locate stories of professional learning and change. These stories have then been subject to further comparative analysis to locate any meta-narrative, in this case one of unlearning. The paper has been given to participants for comment which have been incorporated.

English teachers have been subject to a highly technicised and narrow formal professional education designed to support effective 'delivery' of the national curriculum. Recent shifts to encourage more creative learning for school students has led to a renewed press for school-teacher professional development focused on new pedagogical approaches. This course was one such response.

Here, all journals show that what was happening in the course was not comfortable for any of the participants who together had to let go of things they did not initially realize they held as static knowledge. The university teacher narratives show an abrupt abandonment of the discourse of development and increasing speculations about what was happening in the course. Twelve of the school-teachers' journals tell stories of how they researched and then tried out creative learning approaches in their classrooms; this required them to 'let go' of things they had been taught (predetermined lesson-by-lesson planning, assessment tasks designed at the beginning of the

course, and all outcomes defined ahead of time) and things that they thought they knew (how students liked to learn, the purposes of education). Two teachers did not 'unlearn' and wrote stories of ongoing and undisrupted practice-as-usual. The analysis suggests that the process of unlearning was integral to shifts in practice and in knowledge-about-pedagogical practice.

The focus on unlearning as well as learning may have wider application and may assist the design of postgraduate practitioner-researcher programmes which seek to disrupt tightly-framed pedagogical and discursive regimes.

Anderson, G; Herr, K and Nihlen, S (2007) Studying your own school: An educator's guide to practitioner action research. Second edition Thousand Oaks: Corwin

Carr, W and Kemmis, S (1986) Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research. Lewes: Falmer Press

Elliott, J (1991) Action research for educational change: Developing teachers and teaching. Buckingham: Open University Press

Kemmis, S and McTaggart, R (1988) The action research planner. Geelong: Deakin University Press

Mertler, C (2009) Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Popkewitz, T. (1991). A political sociology of educational reform: Power/knowledge in teaching, teacher education and research. New York: Teachers College Press.

Reissman, C K (1994) Narrative analysis. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Presenter 3

Whose Knowledge, Which Scope of Action? Reflections on Teacher Action Research in Neoliberal Times

The paper has two purposes:

- i) to analyse a large-scale partnership project between a group of schools in a high poverty region and a university team of researchers, funded by the Australian Research Council and known more colloquially as RPiN (Redesigning Pedagogies in the North). Here the main focus is to examine the scope of the changes developed in school and teacher action research projects against the aspiration for action research to improve practice, increase understanding of the practice, and change the context which frames the practice.
- ii) To explore the contextual framing of the schools and university as it was implicated in teacher and university partner expectations and scope of action, aiming to understand the extent to which the context, steeped in neoliberal managerialism, market ideology and competitive individualism, shaped the ways in which the project unfolded.

Framed in traditions of critical action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), and drawing on feminist and participatory action research (Wadsworth, 2010), the paper takes up the challenge of understanding how local action is inextricably connected to context, and how the contemporary policy (un)settlements in education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) provide opportunities and constraints for local action research projects. RPiN worked at two inter-related levels of action research, the university researchers' projects relating to facilitating school and teacher pedagogical and curriculum innovation and the projects of individual and small groups of teachers across 10 schools. Data from the project, approved by the university's Human Ethics Research committee, produced masses of largely qualitative data, including examples of student and teacher work, video and other representations of findings and processes, accumulated over the three years of its operation.

The paper analyses one of the published outcomes, a book collection of teacher and university chapters on teacher research projects. The author, one of the team of university researchers in the project, finds that while many of the projects show strong social justice values, evidence on curriculum and pedagogical innovation in making the community curricular, the scope of the projects was significantly curtailed by the current teacher work intensification, and rarely went beyond the individual teacher's classroom, even to affect the school, let alone the region as originally expected. Questions about the internalisation of the current climate for schools policy and teachers' work are raised, suggesting strategies and tactics for action research projects and their framing that require greater focus on explicit political literacy in the researchers at both the university and the school levels if action research is to widen its scope of change in the service of social justice and educational innovation.

Carr, W & Kemmis, S (1986) Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research.
Lewes: Falmer Press

Rizvi, F. & Lingard, R. (2010) Globalizing education policy. London: Routledge.

Wadsworth, Y. (2010) Building in research and evaluation: Human inquiry for living systems.
Crows Nest NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin

Presenter 4

Ethics, Caring, and Power: Grounding our work in theory and practice

This paper explores dimensions of ethics in action research by highlight its use by teachers, who work in a context of caring, but also one of power. Understanding the particular ways in which ethical issues have been advanced by several key works. Zeni (2001) did some early work in the area, addressing topics of ownership, relationships, and issues particular to teachers in working with their students within a research framework. Campbell and Groundwater-Smith (2007) expanded the area, drawing together a broad range of scholar-practitioners to address university culture, the role of values, and the nature of narrative in research. In both of these works, the special relationship of caring within action research settings plays a major, albeit underexamined role. In this paper I hope to engage session participants in the dimensions of power that are embedded within notions of caring and ethics that teacher-researchers encounter, especially when they are working toward social justice-oriented practice.

Teacher-researchers work in contexts of caring relationships with their students. In addition, many action researchers invoke a notion of social justice in relation to this work. Yet there is little work that explores the body of research around notions of caring in conjunction with notions of justice, especially in a way that is grounded both in conceptual research and in long term work with teachers and schools. This paper draws on scholarship that seeks to examine power and politics in relation to ethics, with a particular focus on the nature of care (Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993).

The methodology juxtaposes data analyzed from field notes, journals, observations and interviews from action research work which generated theories about ethics and caring, against the theories of caring and justice derived from university-based scholars. Narrative from the field work is used to examine the academic scholarship; the academic work is used to explore the field projects.

Discussion of ethics in general, and caring in particular are often imbued with cultural categories and tacit assumptions. In many cases, the significance of this may be lost due to an inability to intertwine discussions of “how should we ‘be’ with each other” with examinations of power and structures of inequality. In conclusion, I argue that without this connection, we cannot generate knowledge that is strong enough to address issues of social justice through action research. My findings are grounded in how participants in the action research process use theories of ethics and caring. But they also highlight how the inter-connections between social theory and field work impact the broader goal of creating closer connections that will enable educational researchers “*to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good.*”

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Held, V. (2006). The ethics of care. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tronto, J. (1993). Moral boundaries. New York: Routledge

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