

Action Research conceptualised in seven cornerstones as conditions for transforming education

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Abstract: This article traces the philosophical and theoretical roots of Action Research to rescript its promise for site-based educational formation, reformation and transformation. The process of historicising Action Research through an extensive review of the extant literature, enabled us to establish seven cornerstones that captured the essence of the critical conditions: the practices and practice architectures, that give coherence and comprehensibility to Action Research as necessary for sustained and sustainable change in education. Framing these practices and practice architectures as cornerstones sets down important benefits for contemporary education requiring critical inquiry, rethought purposeful action and systematic responsive development. The cornerstones: contextuality, commitment, communication, collaboration, criticality, collegiality and community, were derived from viewing Action Research from its historical principle committed to democratic way of working. It is our position that the cornerstones account for, acknowledge and extend traditional perspectives and descriptions; and assist practitioners deepen understandings about the conditions necessary for opening up generative possibilities of Action Research in ways that do not neglect or lose sight of its core historical connections and democratic virtues.

Keywords: Action Research, community, democracy, inquiry, practice architectures, site ontological

Investigación-Acción conceptualizada en siete pilares como condiciones para transformar la educación

Resumen: Este artículo sigue las raíces filosóficas y tóricas de la Investigación Acción para reescribir su promesa de una formación, una reforma y una transformación educativas situadas. El proceso de construir la historicidad de la Investigación Acción a través de una revisión extensiva de la investigación existente nos permitió establecer siete claves que capturaron la esencia de las condiciones críticas: las prácticas y arquitecturas de la práctica, que dan coherencia y hacen comprensible la Investigación Acción son necesarias para el cambio continuo y sostenible en la educación. Enmarcar estas prácticas y arquitecturas de la práctica como claves trae importantes beneficios para la educación contemporánea que requiere investigación crítica, acción repensada y con sentido, y un desarrollo sistemático sensible. Las claves: contextualidad, compromiso, comunicación, colaboración, criticidad, colegialidad y comunidad, se derivaron desde la observación de la Investigación Acción desde su principio histórico comprometido con formas democráticas de trabajo. Nuestra posición es que las claves explican, reconocen y extienden perspectivas y descripciones clásicas; y ayudan a quienes realizan la práctica a profundizar su comprensión sobre las condiciones necesarias para abrir posibilidades generativas de Investigación Acción sin desatender o perder de vista sus conexiones históricas centrales y sus virtudes democráticas.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción, comunidad, democracia, investigación, arquitecturas del a práctica, ontología situada

Introduction

Action Research has a long of history in the field of educational sciences. Its basis has emerged from philosopher's ideas and views on democratic values in society (see notably, Dewey, 1916;1997). For newer generations, education forms an important pathway for guiding, negotiating and fostering these values: values open to critical inquiry, rethought purposeful action, and systematic responsive development. Throughout this history we have witnessed how Action Research has arisen as essential for fostering a critical inquiry stance in education. This is a stance necessary for provoking teachers and leaders to reflect critically and act responsively, with the view to forming, reforming and transforming their educational practices. In recent times, education has been described as being about helping "prepare people to live well in a world worth living in" (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p.14). This view highlights a double purpose of education as addressing the reciprocity between individual and collective goals with formational and transformational aspirations for both. These goals are captured in this definition of education by Kemmis, et al. (2014b, p.26) who stated:

Education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind.

Finding the critical connections between Action Research and education has been at the forefront of thinking by Carr and Kemmis (1986), who suggested that education is about critical praxis, requiring a person to demonstrably "make a wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in this situation" (p. 190). Here the practices of education, and so educational Action Research, must demonstrate an observable commitment to human well-being, the search for truth and the respect of all others (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). On this view, education is witnessed in the praxis and practices of people: this position has critical yet fundamental implications for understanding and practicing Action Research in contemporary times.

In recent years, in a climate where education is scrutinised intensely in terms of accountability, standards and performativity, educational Action Research has enjoyed a resurgence as an approach for transforming education practices. However, amidst this endeavour there has been a tendency in some jurisdictions to dismantle the foundations of Action Research by valorising hybridised practices where specific components or activities are packaged into bundles of segmented strategies, arrangements or methods¹ (Carr & Kemmis, 2005) or pushed as policy directives (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009) for implementing Action Research. Such tendencies exsanguinate the rich embodied heart of Action Research, reducing it to being considered as short-term time-bounded professional development

1 For instance, shorter term professional activities like dialogue circles, reading circles, inquiry learning, collegial learning and so on.