

Discussion Paper: Response to *Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research*

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This paper is a response to the paper entitled *On the Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research* by Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea, and Streck, published in the previous edition of the journal. Their paper raises several important and challenging issues upon which I offer my perspective. I have focussed upon the phenomenon of power and advocate a deeper understanding of the insidious nature of abstract forms of power. I argue that this involves the creation of practices through which such forms of power can be demystified in the interests of the development of *contextual literacy*, that is, the ability to “read” the socio-political contexts accurately and, thereby, ensure relevant strategic action. Creating this capability has implications for the development of new Action Researchers within the context of the Academy. Finally, I explore the challenges facing university-based Action Researchers in their demystification of the institutional power/logic that pre-empts political action through engagement with social movements committed to the protection of democratic ideals and social justice.

Recognising the centrality of power to the social construction of political realities

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of Action Research, a research methodology embedded in the social constructionist paradigm, underpin the position that social realities are politically constructed and reconstructed by those who wield the most effective forms of power. More important than agentic power, which is easily apprehended and thus open to contestation, are abstract forms of power that operate surreptitiously and insidiously. The demystification of abstract power, and its dynamics, is critical to the aspirational goal of Action Research to contribute to the social construction of political realities in which democratic ideals are realised. The complex task of accurately apprehending these forms of power and their insidious influence, however, constitutes a daunting proposition for those working towards this goal.

Power manifests in many complex forms and the invention of the sophisticated technical apparatus and associated algorithms that underpin insidious forms of surveillance, has added to the forms of abstract power that operate surreptitiously in the interests of power elites. Through such power, these elites facilitate the general experience of a socially constructed political reality as “taken-for-granted”; that is, of being a “natural” and “inevitable” phenomenon of life. Unable to apprehend these forms of power, potential opposition to them is