Interview Davydd Greenwood

The Mid-career Making of an Action Researcher

Davydd J. Greenwood

Danilo and Miren:
Thank you, Davydd, for this interview for the readers of International Journal of Action Research. We are pleased to have your insights in this special issue that you have edited together with colleagues from Norway and the Basque Country in Spain. We think that this can provide the reader with a perspective on your experience and trajectory that will help better understand the contents presented through the different articles.

Let's start giving the reader a perspective on your trajectory. Why and how did you come to AR?

Davydd:
Narrating history backwards tends to rationalize that history, making it more coherent than it was. With that caveat, I will dive in.

I did not set out to become an action researcher. Born in Colorado in the middle of World War II, the grandchild of immigrants from four countries and the child of a psychiatrist and a psychiatric nurse, I grew up in Topeka, Kansas, a city almost divided into thirds: a White third, an African American third, and a Latino (in this case, Mexican) third. The latter two were clearly on the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. The reason for this was that, in first half of the 20th century, United States railroads were still important. Topeka, Kansas, the terminus of the "Santa Fe Trail" had the central offices and shops of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, one of the largest in the country. Most African Americans came to Topeka during World War I to work on the railroad and replace the "Whites" who had gone to war. In World War II, African Americans also went to war and so Mexicans immigrated to Topeka to take the railroad jobs. The city was segregated racially until 1954. I was in grade school when the Supreme Court decision "Brown vs the School Board of Topeka, Kansas" made segregated schools illegal. I remember the first African American children coming into my grade school for the first time.

One peculiarity of Topeka was that, in a town of 100,000 people, it had only one huge urban high school, built during the Depression. As a result, all the high school students in Topeka were there. Though the race-ethnic groups kept to themselves to a degree and there was tracking of students into vocational and higher education, we all met in the marching band, the band, the orchestra, the pep band, and on sports teams and events. One of the local Mexican immigrants became my Spanish language teacher in high school. He was charismatic, humble, and fascinating to me and I became a dedicated learner of Spanish because of my curiosity about him. Growing out of this, my family arranged an exchange with a middle-class family in Mexico City and my international life began.

I mention these experiences because there never was a time that I could be unaware of cultural differences, racism, and class, something I discovered later that many "White" Americans were and are oblivious to. And because I had good experiences with my musical

and sports friends from other groups and my parents supported these relationships, I developed an enduring curiosity about people and cultures different from mine.

When I went to college, I wanted to continue in Spanish and became a Spanish language and literature major, later double majoring in Anthropology and adding Latin American Studies. This took place in a 1200 student liberal arts college in the middle of the Iowa corn and wheatfields, Grinnell College. Grinnell was in its fanatical liberal arts phase, teaching us to respect knowledge from all fields and encouraging us to understand that there was an infinite amount to know and learn. I learned that you can never know enough. They even gave us a third-year liberal arts examination on universal knowledge, together with bibliographies running to thousands of pages. I think the aim was to show us how much more there was to learn than we already knew. Grinnell was also where I met my wife of 57 years, a Spaniard, in a Spanish literature class we took together. Our history together initially was only possible because of those Spanish classes back in Topeka and learning to seek out and learn from cultural differences.

Among the many things the Grinnell experience did for me, it affected my understanding of the importance of learning how to learn and how necessary it is to disregard disciplinary boundaries and rules in search of understanding. By comparison, graduate school in Anthropology, despite some wonderful mentors who took an interest in me, was a disappointingly narrow business and served as my first introduction to the Tayloristic world of academic life.

As an anthropologist and fortunately with the support of my mentors, I decided to do my dissertation research in Spain. In the 1960's, this was generally off limits to anthropology because anthropology had become understood as the social study of people of color outside of the United States, Canada, and Europe. Indeed, Europe was not designated an acceptable research area in professional anthropology in the US until the 1990's. Since I was a good student, my mentors left me alone, but I then had to figure out how to work in Spain. My dissertation advisor was an expert on Japan. At that time there was very little anthropology written about Spain. With a tip from one of my professors, I finally found the books on the Basque Country of the brilliant Spanish anthropologist, linguist, and historian, Julio Caro Baroja. Based on reading them, I wrote a proposal to the National Institute of Mental Health and was funded for 3 years of dissertation research and writing. The inconvenience was that I knew next to nothing about Spanish history, ethnography, or even geography. On arrival in the Basque Country, I went to meet Julio Caro Baroja. Generously, he took me on as an informal student and became a colleague and lifelong friend. His immense knowledge and the incredible library at his home in Navarre showed me again how much there was to learn, how little I knew, and the incalculable value of good mentoring.

I completed a dissertation on the political economic evolution of Basque family farming under the impact of industrialization and tourism and the massive rural exodus that was visible in the late 1960 s. While we were there, the ETA movement broke out and I became a witness to and student of ethnic violence and identity politics in the heart of a fascist regime, a theme that has also played a major role in my own intellectual career.

To foreshorten this history, I then got a professorship in Anthropology at Cornell University where I taught from 1970 to 2014. In that context, I found myself quickly unhappy with the restrictive view of anthropology as the study of the "other". I tried hard to develop an integrated biological-archeological-linguistic-cultural introductory course for anthropology only to meet with resistance from my anthropology colleagues. I had more in common with

the European historians, political scientists, and economists than with the anthropologists. I soon moved out of the department and joined the Program on Science, Technology, and Society. From there I was recruited to direct the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies. This was a university-wide organization including 24 programs and 500 faculty. I was told to direct and revitalize the center, but the programs all had their own structures, some had their own budgets, and most of the program directors did not report to me or support me. In addition, the relations among the programs were terrible. They competed with each other for space, budget, and respect. They frequently came to me demanding that I stop wasting resources on programs other than theirs. I began realizing that organizational dynamics and structures really matter and that academic institutions are generally example of terrible organizational processes, a topic that has become central to much of my subsequent action research.

At the time, in the Extension Division of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, there was a program called Program for Workplace and Employment Systems founded by the famous sociologist-anthropologist William Foote Whyte. Bill Whyte was a strong believer in cooperatives and in organizational democracy and had decided that no one had written a book about the Mondragón industrial cooperatives in the Basque Country from which people could draw lessons and learn. He did speak Spanish but did not know anything about the Basque Country. He heard about me and approached me about helping with his (and his wife′s) project. Together we got a grant and went to Mondragón with two missions. First, he wanted to finish and corroborate the views in his book on the cooperatives. In return, we were committed to offering the cooperatives whatever help they wanted from us for their own purposes.

This evolved into a peculiar situation. I found myself thrust into a room with 20 members of the central offices of the cooperatives with pads and pencils at the ready and a two-month mission of studying their fear of the loss of commitment to cooperative values. Because the cooperatives had grown massively to become the biggest industrial group in the Basque Country, they feared the core values were being diluted. With no experience in work in industry and very little knowledge of the cooperatives, I had no plan to offer them. As the reader can imagine, we began with a very uneasy couple of days of tension about a lack of direction, disappointment in me, and fear about looking bad to the General Manager for having begun such a poorly planned activity. What occurred to me was that the world′s leading experts on the cooperatives were right in the room and I knew that they had access to the whole system, its archives, and financial information. My only expertise was speaking Spanish and facilitating learning processes, particularly teaching people how to do research. So, in shared desperation, my Mondragón counterpart, José Luis González Santos (head of HR) and I began the creation of a learning community with the 20 cooperative members.

We began with roundtable discussions about what they believed to be the most pressing problems of the cooperatives. It became apparent that their worry was that too many new members were joining simply because the cooperatives offered good paying jobs with good benefits. It was assumed that they had no interest in the values underlying the cooperative system. I encouraged them to begin an inquiry process by challenging them to examine this proposition empirically. After debating among themselves for some time, they decided that they needed to branch out, collect data, and interview people. This led quickly into a study of the history of the system, the one strike they had in their history, and a set of efforts to support their claims about the loss of cooperative values.

During the process, I helped them to learn how to do structured and unstructured interviews, content analysis of documents, focus groups and ethnographic observations. I was careful not to do the work myself but to serve as a teacher and supporter both because I did not know enough to do anything else and because they had the access and interest to carry this forward to keep the cooperative movement on track.

The other contribution I made was to press them to support their inferences about the processes and behaviors they observed. I particularly emphasized that they should entertain seriously the possibility that their inferences might be wrong. This forced them to gather evidence that could persuade others. Ultimately this created an unexpected benefit and learning. They discovered that many of the new recruits had joined the cooperatives for entirely pragmatic reasons, just as they feared. But they also discovered that many of these same recruits became strongly committed to cooperative values because of the experience of working in the system. They also found out that many of these new members were harshly critical of aspects of cooperative management, including the HR group carrying out this study. In the view of many members, these managers did not live up to cooperative values. This surprise caused the managers to work hard to change some of the negative features of cooperative management that the new members had identified, specifically processes carried out by their own central HR department. Together we wrote two books about this experience. One was used for years as required reading for new cooperative members (Greenwood, González-Santos, et al.,1989, 1992).

In the meantime, two other things happened. Back at Cornell, given the experience I was having in Mondragón, I decided to open up the budget, office space planning, and decision processes of the Center for International Studies to the program directors themselves. I wanted them to experience the problems I had firsthand and to see if they could come up with better solutions. After an initial period of consternation about this idea and after testing my resolve, they did indeed become a collaborative group. Later, together they organized to demand more resources from the university administration, something that did not endear us to an administration that was happy to have a group of faculty engaged in their own turf wars and not bothering the administration.

Bill Whyte then told me that what I had done in Mondragón was “action research”, the first time I heard the term. He invited me to write a chapter about it in a book he was publishing (Whyte, ed., 1990). Since then, I have identified myself as an action researcher. I have co-authored two editions of the Introduction to Action Research with Morten Levin (1998, 2006), a score of articles with him and other publications on my own and with other colleagues. In the end, I came to focus on trying to use action research to reform higher education.

The work in Mondragón brought the participants to the attention of key actors in the Norwegian Industrial Democracy movement. One member of that movement, Morten Levin, had already spent a year at Cornell with Whyte′s group. We then reconnected at the memorial conference for the founder of the Norwegian Industrial Democracy movement, Einar Thorsrud. There I met a fascinating group of international action researchers (among them Björn Gustavsen, Eric Trist, Donald Schön, Dan Bar-On, Werner Fricke and many others). Soon after, I ended up teaching with Morten Levin in 3 action research PhD programs he designed at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and participating in a number of the Norwegian national action research programs.

Danilo and Miren:
What life experiences and authors have been important reference in your work? Could you tell us how they have impacted your trajectory?

Davydd:
My first book, on Basque agriculture, is a comprehensive micro- and macro-economic and socio-cultural study of family farming. It is one of the most carefully documented quantitative studies of family farming the anthropological literature (Greenwood, 1976). It showed that these farmers were perfectly capable entrepreneurs but that the younger generation could not tolerate being identified as low-class farmers in direct contradistinction to previous generations. They preferred to risk insecure and poorly paid factory work to continuing the practices of their parents. Despite the extent of the documentation and quantitative backup in that study, compared to the Mondragon research, I have a great deal more confidence in the conclusions of the Mondragón study. It passed the test of convincing knowledgeable actors, and the results were put into practice. By comparison, my Basque farming book is a very well-documented interpretation of a process from a "spectator" position. I have come to prefer action research because it is more scientifically meaningful and is tested in action. As a result, I have lost respect for spectator social science and find myself unable to engage in social research from an outsider perspective.

The other dimension of AR is the teamwork it involves. In the Mondragón project and the many others that came after, the most memorable and exciting feature of the process was the joint learning community and the pleasure of collegial interactions among very differently situated people, along with the enduring friendships created in the process. The solo scholar operating as an authoritative free agent is a kind of academic I gladly stopped being.

The circumstantial coincidence of my duties as Director of the Einaudi Center for International Studies and in the Mondragón project gave me a perspective on the organizational pathologies of universities as Tayloristic siloed battlefields of political and economic power. They are organizations dedicated mainly to themselves and very little interested in studying problems that matter to non-university people unless those problems result in external budget subsidies for research. The contrast between this and the values and practices of Mondragón are stark. This has been reinforced by subsequent visits to the Mondragón University which is run as a cooperative, uses a participatory pedagogy, and links to the surrounding community and region as a value commitment. That university shows that universities do not have to be neoliberal, authoritarian money pits (Wright, Greenwood, and Boden, 2011).

Regarding authors, I have already mentioned William Foote Whyte and Julio Caro Baroja whose complete works I had soon read. I have also been strongly influenced by the reading of Kurt Lewin, Stephen Toulmin, Paul Feyerabend, Myles Horton, John Gaventa, Mary Belenky, Helen Lewis, Budd Hall, Rajesh Tandon, R. David Brown, Chris Argyiris, Donald Schön, Paolo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda, Augusto Boal, William Torbert, Mary Brydon-Miller, Patricia Maguire, Carmelo Lisón Tolosana, Bruno Latour, and Tomás Rodríguez Villasante, among many others. The heterogeneity of this list illustrates the enduring value of that Grinnell liberal arts perspective throughout my life.

Danilo and Miren:

From influential authors, we move to influential colleagues. You have extensively written with action researchers from different parts of the world. What have you learnt from these collaborations?

Davydd:
These collaborative writing projects have been addictive as learning processes. Because writing is one of the most disciplined forms of thinking, figuring out how to write something together is truly challenging. It requires a synthesis of diverse experiences, extensive negotiations about contents, priorities and exposition, and the development of a shared language. The process of arriving at a mutually acceptable manuscript is a direct analogy for me of the kind of mutual learning that action research is built on. In addition, the point of collaborative writing is that all the participants have a piece of the puzzle, unique experiences and perspectives, and variable energies. When one is stuck, another comes and adds perspective and energy to the mix and puts the process back in motion. In addition, while there are some compromises involved in shared writing, the learning trajectory these efforts have created remains so exciting that I am currently engaged in 4 more collaborative writing projects. It is also an indictment of universities and ministries of education that collaborative research and writing is actually discouraged or even punished by the stupid quantitative reference system imposed now on most neoliberal institutions.

Danilo and Miren:
Let us now focus on one specific colleague. You have relevant publications with Morten Levin, and your "Introduction to Action Research" has been a basic reading for many action researchers. How did you meet each other? What would you underline as the most relevant outcome of this collaboration?

Davydd:
As indicated earlier, Morten and I met first at Cornell when he was on a sabbatical but got to know each other better at the Thorsrud Memorial Conference in Oslo. He was a regular visitor to Cornell and participated in my action research seminar. He invited me to lecture at a Ph.D. seminar in Norway for his first cohort of action research PhD. Students and he sent a graduate student to Cornell for a year and brough others and colleagues for short visits. The student who stayed for a year was Johan E. Ravn, a co-author of this special issue and also a participant in the first action research seminar I ever taught (badly) at Cornell. Subsequently, Morten invited me to join a number of Norwegian nationally funded industrial democracy programs and to participate in 2 more PhD programs as a full faculty member. Trond Haga, another co-author of this special issue, was one of those Ph.D. students.

Another dimension of our relationship is our differences. Morten′s first degree was in engineering and then a Ph.D. in sociology. My training was in the humanities and anthropology. We have quite different worldviews. I was always impressed that almost any technical matter that came up seemed transparent to Morten′s engineering mind while contradictory socio-cultural processes seemed quite understandable to me and more opaque to him. A synthesis of such perspectives is, in fact, the essence of socio-technical systems design.

Morten and I developed a wonderful collaboration both as co-authors and as friends. We outlined together but always wrote drafts independently and then edited each other′s work. Over time, we both concluded that the lessons of action research are absolutely fundamental to

the reform of higher education away from the neoliberal Tayloristic model that dominates the university, truncates education, limits community relations, and undercuts socially meaningful research. The sad reality now is that we can no longer write together because of Morten′s health.

Danilo and Miren:
One of the issues you have addressed together with Morten Levin is the transformation of universities. What is your perspective on this nowadays?

Davydd:
Throughout our writing on universities, Morten and I have been intensely critical of the organizational design of universities in hermetic disciplinary units. The organizational development of the contemporary university at the end of the 19th century resulted in carving the world of research and teaching into disciplinary mini cartels, a model borrowed directly from F.W. Taylor′s "scientific management". It divides a process into its smallest units (designed and orchestrated by engineering experts) and creates restrictive and repetitive work routines. All of this is integrated from above by managers who do not in fact do the work and often do not know how to. The workers′ job is to do as they are told, not to think for themselves.

This is the exact opposite of what action research processes produce. The knowledge, experiences, and skills of all the members of the organization are considered essential components in a good and sustainable organizational system. And when organizational redesign is required, it is the full set of stakeholders who actually produce the "value" in the organization who have the capacity to participate in designing and then implementing the re-design.

Siloed knowledge and teaching create isolated experts, confuses vocational training with teaching and feeds into an accountability system that treats teaching and research as quantifiable forms of commodity production with students viewed as "customers" and faculty as "fee-for-service providers". Fools with spreadsheets pretend to judge the quality of research and teaching work they neither understand nor care about. Their staffs increase constantly and most are paid considerably better than the faculty or the middle and lower-level staff for perpetrating this fictional world of meaningless but profitable rankings.

These problems are widely known and ultimately make the system unsustainable. Increasingly business leaders have stopped requiring a university degree for job seekers. They have learned that university graduates tend not to have the training to work across boundaries, to learn how to learn, to collaborate on teams, and generally create value for their companies. The disconnect between the kind of education needed and the "training" provided and between the research being done and the research that is needed is shocking. All the while, this is being done at an ever higher financial cost to both students and governments. Senior academic administrators with large salaries flourish while many faculty positions and many indebted students have been made part of the "precariat".

Action research would create very differently structured universities whose mission is avowedly pro-social. That this can be done is demonstrated by successful universities like the Mondragón University and a variety of alternative higher education institutions like Berea College (Wright and Greenwood, 2018). In a world in which the planetary ecology is breaking down, authoritarianism and conspiracy theories abound, the neoliberal university is not part of the solution; it is part of the problem.

Danilo and Miren:
We continue reflecting about universities. Together with Morten Levin you launched and developed PhD programs based on action research. Do you keep in touch with those students? Is their work impacting the action research community nowadays? And are there similar experiences around the world that can strengthen action research in university environments?

Davydd:
We do stay in touch with some of the students. Many of the students in those cohorts remain in touch with each other. In addition to the co-authoring already mentioned, I routinely hear from former students about their ongoing work. In one case, a subgroup of students from one of my action research seminars still meets somewhere in the world each year after 20 years since that class took place. I believe that more than a few of Morten Levin′s Ph.D. students also remain in touch with each other and collaborate from time to time.

We do not believe we are unique. I know that the students around Tomás Rodríguez Villasante have extensive networks in Europe and Latin America. This is the case with Budd Hall, Mary Brydon-Miller, and many others. AR+ (https://actionresearchplus.com/) also networks students and colleagues as does ALARA (https://www.alarassociation.org/). The kind of collaborative teaching and learning that AR promotes does create lasting relationships and networks.

Danilo and Miren:
In this issue you publish an in-depth analysis of two cases, one is Norwegian, the other related to the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque Country, Spain. Both Norway and Mondragon have been relevant in your action research trajectory. Could you tell us about what they mean for you and their connection with how you understand action research?

Davydd:
As I wrote earlier, going to Mondragón initially was the result of a combination of my curiosity and serendipity. Once I got involved, I found a renewed sense of the value of democratic practices and learned to value the scientific potential of action research when compared to positivism and other forms of "inaction research" and the "inhumanities". At the time, I knew next to nothing about Norway and Norwegian industrial democracy, but the Norwegians were interested in Mondragón and generally tried to track those developments. The combination of Morten Levin′s presence at Cornell and the Norwegian interest in Mondragón provided a bridge that I crossed into engagement with the Norwegians.

Over the years, I learned a great deal more about action research approaches from the Norwegians, particularly socio-technical systems design as developed by Thorsrud, Phillip Herbst, Fred and Merrelyn Emery, and Eric Trist. The socio-technical systems design model actually gave me a lot to think about when looking back at Mondragón. It seemed relatively clear to me that Mondragón has created an impressive system of political participation and worker ownership but that, compared with the Norwegian companies at the level of the shopfloor, many of the cooperatives seem to continue operating within a Tayloristic organizational framework. As a result, I thought that Mondragón had lessons to learn from Norwegian industrial democracy about work processes involving participation.

By the same token, I felt that the Norwegians could gain something from seeing participatory processes in an environment where unions are prohibited, and member needs are

attended to through other systems giving them both voice and power. I thought this might be particularly relevant to the problems in Norway where the lack of a labor force of sufficient scale which has meant the recruitment of large numbers of temporary foreign workers who are imperfectly integrated into their systems.

I have pursued this comparison for years and then had the opportunity to organize a "summit" search conference in Mondragón to which Norwegians and some US participants were invited. That summit increased Mondragón′s curiosity about the Norwegian practices. To build on that, I proposed we engage in a systematic comparative study of the Norwegian and Mondragón systems with a group of participants from both systems. This collaboration has lasted 3 years and resulted in the special issue published here. Going forward it will involve mutual visits between Norway and Mondragón, further comparative research and writing, and a collaborative attempt to address the challenges both systems face in the current global neoliberal environment, so hostile to democracy and participation.

Danilo and Miren:
Many readers might connect your name to Cornell University and English speaking (and publishing) research communities. However, you are also fluent in Spanish and relate to Spanish speaking research communities in Spain and Latin America. The dialogue between these two communities is not always easy. What is your experience with it?

Davydd:
In my experience, this dialogue has been difficult, often unproductive, and occasionally reduced to mutual stereotyping. I learned about this very quickly. The first international action research meeting I organized (with Ira Harkavy of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania) brought together significant senior people from Norwegian industrial democracy, some leaders of organizational learning and reflective practice, and practitioners from Participatory Research both in the global South and the global North. Very early in that process, one of the "Southern" participatory researchers felt so offended by the organizational learning-reflective practice facilitator that he left the meeting and went home without further ado. That day, I learned about the tripwires and the depth of the differences separating different views of action research.

Because I had done 3 months of field work in a Mexican village in Oaxaca, a place without running water or electricity and assailed by gun violence, alcohol abuse, and a coercive and dangerous national police force, I had direct experience of some of the conditions of poverty, inequality, violence, and resilience found in such settings. The contrast between doing action research in such settings and in a Norwegian factory seemed unbridgeable. I remember well a visit by Orlando Fals Borda to Cornell in which he invited William Foote Whyte and me to his Convergence conference in Cartagena, Colombia in 1997, offering Foote Whyte a "treaty" because he felt Whyte had improperly appropriated the term "participatory action research" from the global South. This gesture dramatized the gulf but also was an invitation to get past it. We took a large delegation from Cornell and from Norway to Cartagena and eventually helped create an archive of the conference materials that we made available through Cornell for about a decade after that. I also met Tomás Rodriguez Villasante there along with a major group of Latin American action researchers.

Given these experiences, I found myself dissatisfied with the relative blindness to power relations that characterized much of the "Northern" AR literature. Some of the practices struck

me as both paternalistic and therapeutic in a coercive sense. While I was working through this, I also began reading the Participatory Research literature arising from the global North. The work of Myles Horton, John Gaventa, Mary Belenky, Patricia Maguire, Helen Lewis and others made it clear to me, as I knew growing up around farming communities in Kansas, that there was a significant "South" in the "North" and that the North-South division among action researchers served no one′s interest and inhibited learning.

By the same token, I felt that more than a few of the "Southern" action researchers had something to learn from the techniques and processes of socio-technical systems design and reflective practice. I felt that both sides had something significant to offer to each other that together we could strengthen and diversify the practices of action research. This conviction is what led Morten Levin and me to frame our book, Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change (1998, 2006) as a review of major variants of action research. We tried to do justice to the differences, strengths, and weaknesses of the different approaches.

More recently, I participated in the SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry (Burns, Howard, and Ospina, eds., 2022) and out of that, as a follow-up, a Spanish-speaking group of chapter authors has begun a set of dialogues with Latin American practitioners of participatory research in hopes of creating both a joint learning community and improving each other′s practices. All of this is a work in progress as political and ethical differences continue to exist and, under current world conditions, are unlikely to go away.

Danilo and Miren:
Considering the previous and other experiences, what would you highlight (positive and/or negative) from your lifelong AR practices?

Davydd:
Action Research transformed my professional and personal life from the moment I began to discover its dimensions. It linked my academic abilities and training to engagement in the world beyond the university. It tested my ability to contribute to enhancing liberating and democratic outcomes for the engaged stakeholders. The demands of action research, beyond time and effort, also fit my desire to keep learning and expanding my horizons. Every case raises issues of knowledge, learning, methodological improvements, and ethical challenges that keep stretching me. The ideal action researcher would be an expert in all disciplines, a fabulous facilitator, an ethical person, and a good friend. Since none of us masters all of these dimensions, being a good action researcher is an endlessly aspirational goal.

In addition, Mondragón and Norway made it evident to me that action research produces more reliable, detailed, and meaningful knowledge than any other form of research. It is far closer to the experimental scientific method than is positivism and other forms of "spectator" research. So, I also practice action research because it is "better" research than the alternatives.

Finally, action research deepened my commitment to democratization, the welfare state, and liberating human potential. Some of the very best human experiences I have ever had grow directly out of action research projects. By the same token, every step I took in the direction of action research has alienated me from the neoliberal academy with its silos, egotisms, and turf wars. An action researcher can only feel like an "outsider" in such institutions.

Danilo and Miren:

Considering today's multifaceted crises (economic, political, cultural, environmental, among others) does action research have a special role? How can action research become (more) relevant?

Davydd:
This question is very much on my mind and elides directly with the next question. My growing sense of despair at the resurgence of authoritarianism and at the political incompetence and cynicism of so many actors around the world leads me close to the edge. Since at least the time of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Myles Horton, Paolo Freire, Eric Trist, and many others, and certainly much earlier, we have known how to organize collaborative and participatory systems that are more beneficial to all the stakeholders and more sustainable. And yet, most institutions and political systems are engaged in doing the opposite. They enhance authoritarian, paternalistic and maladaptive approaches to problems and, quite predictably, fail, becoming part of the problem rather than the solution. Radical individualism, global economic elites, and pitiless exploitation of both the poor and world resources remain the tonic of our age. Even the clear evidence that neither the planetary ecology nor world politics can survive this behavior fails to dissuade cynical and egotistical elites from their selfish courses of action.

I have been stuck in this view for some time, continuing to work to promote action research but without much hope of success. And then, I began interacting with the next generation of action researchers on a new project.

Danilo and Miren:
When reviewing your latest writing projects, we see that you collaborate with young co-authors. We have also heard you refer to them as the next generation of action researchers. How do you feel about this? Do you perceive there is a relay in the action research community? Are you optimistic about the future of action research?

Davydd:
While Sage Publications finds the sales of Greenwood and Levin, Introduction to Action Research, 2nd edition too low to merit a third edition, every single day I receive notifications from Academia.edu and ResearchGate about people reading both the first and second editions. Clearly the book and its perspectives have some audience. A great many of these readers are international. This led me to think that there should be a third edition that would have to be taken to a new publisher.

Because of Morten Levin′s illness, I decided to recruit two younger action researchers, Johan E. Ravn and Koen Bartels for the effort. I had gotten to know each in quite different contexts. These younger scholars with relatively young families and lots of research experience are committed action researchers with very different backgrounds and perspectives. As happens with any good project, the incorporation of new partners has led to a complete rethinking of the project.

Rather than a third edition, a new approach to introducing action research has emerged from our conversations. Following Koen′s lead, supported by Johan′s action research on the de-carbonization of Norwegian industry, the question of ecological and political sustainability has become the central theme of the new book project. We no longer simply make intellectual and empirical arguments for action research, though they are broadly present in the planned

book. Rather we say that if we want to salvage the planetary ecology and social peace, the only possible approach is through a robust commitment to action research. Conventional research and conventional academic divisions of labor has not made a dent in these urgent problems as the current crises and the failure to meet carbon reduction targets show.

The book has a publisher and will be developed over the next year. I have gone into detail because I have experienced the vitality of the generational transition toward a broader and more ambitious practice of action research. My younger colleagues have convinced me that this is the only way forward and I urge my senior colleagues to find opportunities to enjoy this new dynamism.

Danilo and Miren:
To close the interview, we would like to ask you about International Journal of Action Research (IJAR). What do you see as the distinctive role of IJAR?

Davydd:
I have been involved with the journal since its founding as Concepts and Transformation many years ago and followed its development into the International Journal of Action Research. When the editorship passed to Danilo Streck, a significant opportunity for bridging the South-North gap in action research practices and relationships was opened up. I clearly applaud this editorial direction, one that I know Miren Larrea will maintain since her own work builds on these relations. This gives IJAR a unique and valuable voice in the future global development of Action Research.

Danilo and Miren:
Which are your ideas, which your wishes regarding IJAR's future development?

Davydd:
I don′t believe IJAR needs my advice at this point as the journal has embarked on a productive path that is both unique to it and fits the needs of the international action research stakeholders. Perhaps a strategy of convoking a set of specific topics – sustainability, north-south dialogue, action research training, etc. – for special issues over a couple of years would advance these goals. The special issues should not drive out spontaneous contributions since that would lose the opportunities to hear other voices and learn about new projects. Still an interaction between such special issues and open issues could enhance the IJAR project going forward.

Danilo and Miren:
Thanks very much, Davydd, for your insights.

References

Burns, D., Howard, J., & Ospina, S. (Eds.). (2022). *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry.* Sage Publications.

Greenwood, D. J. (1976). *Unrewarding wealth: The commercialization and collapse of agriculture in a Spanish Basque town.* Cambridge University Press.

Greenwood, D. J., Santos, J. L. G., & et al. (1989). *Culturas de FAGOR: Estudio antropológico de las cooperativas de Mondragón.* Txertoa.

Greenwood, D., & Santos, J. L. G. (1992). *Industrial Democracy as Process: Participatory Action Research in the Fagor Cooperative Group of Mondragón.* Van Gorcum Publishers.

Greenwood, D., & Levin, M. (1998). *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change.* Sage Publications.

Greenwood, D., & Levin, M. (2006). *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Whyte, W. F. (Ed.). (1990). *Participatory Action Research* (Vol. 123). SAGE Publications.

Wright, S., & Greenwood, D. (2017). Recreating Universities for the Public Good: Pathways to a better world, *Learning and Teaching, 10*(1). https://doi.org/10.3167/latiss.2017.100101.

Wright, S., Greenwood, D., & Boden, R. (2011). Report on a Field Visit to Mondragón University: A Cooperative Experience/Experiment. *Learning and Teaching: International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*, *4*(3), 38–56. https://doi.org/10.3167/latiss.2011.040304.