

A new stage in an evolving journal

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Three years ago, I was about to initiate my journey as editor in chief of International Journal of Action Research, today I am preparing to pass the baton to Lone Hersted, who will be the next editor in chief. I am thankful for these three years, the people I have met, the discussions we have had and all we have accomplished together.

The relay takes place after a symposium that has brought the group of editors closer together in the aim of making the journal more inclusive and relevant in the face of the challenges the world is facing. The reflections of the symposium on how to transform higher education, decentralize action research, and connect and communicate, will hopefully transform into a special issue of the journal in the future. We also discussed the role of journals to bring the community of action researchers around the world together. IJAR has now a challenging and simultaneously exciting path ahead. The immediate next step in this path is the publication of this new issue, with four research papers and an interview.

One of the discussions in the symposium related to the need to take emotions, and not only reason, into account in action research processes. Art is one approach to exploring emotions and art is precisely at the core of the first of the papers in this issue, “Look both ways before crossing: Using a triangulation of art-based methods to transform student – staff relationships as it relates to school climate”. In this paper Jennifer Beaudoin and Miranda D’Amico present their experience in a Montréal school where they facilitated a process to improve student-staff relationships, and through that, school climate. In this process they integrated three arts-based methods (timeline, relational map and photovoice). The article presents many of the drawings and pictures made by students, together with their words. In their concluding section the authors describe how they situated youth as expert stakeholders into the conversation with the goal of creating a space where sustainable school improvement initiatives could be discussed and materialized. They also argue that by co-creating these democratic spaces, where students assumed positions of equality and insight, they built capacity for “viable personal and institutional growth”.

The second paper, “Participatory action- research as educational methodology and for social inclusion. Experiences in scenarios of social segregation and unwanted isolation” by Imanol Telleria Herrera and Maria del Mar Lledó Sainz de Rozas, relates to educational contexts too. It addresses a process developed by master students at the University of the Basque Country who engaged in various associations working with citizens in situation of vulnerability. They worked with various dimensions of social exclusion such as social segregation and unwanted isolation. This process, inspired by participatory action research, had a twofold impact in terms of new knowledge. On the one hand, it was a source of practical knowledge for students that got engaged in the process. On the other hand, all participants (the most socially vulnerable, the associations in which they participated, and university students

and academics) together cogenerated knowledge about the challenges they faced. Specifically, they learnt how to strengthen individual and collective competences and promote awareness that transforms both individuals and their environment. The authors conclude that with new community approaches and the active participation of students, complex social issues can be addressed.

The third research paper of this issue continues by addressing again the challenges of vulnerable citizens. This time Claudia Spiess and Suna Kircali present their paper entitled “How does the collaboration work? An Analysis of Power in the Disabled in Politics Cooperative Project and its Implication for Action Research”. The paper addresses a very relevant concept in action research, power, and takes the reader into a case developed in Switzerland where power unfolded in the relationship between the three institutions participating as stakeholders in the process. The authors use Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of capital to interpret what happened and contribute to literature by proposing Bourdieu’s template as a conceptual framework that can help action researchers gain awareness on how power unfolds in the processes they facilitate. They also show that this conceptual framework can help understand practical dimensions of projects such as how external institutional structures or funders influence the balance of power within the project team, or who benefits from the project and how.

The fourth paper “Initiating a Dynamic Co-Constructed One Health Project: reflections from Participatory Action Research in the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo” is written by Eloise Dagneau, Fanny Procureur, Krizia Vieri, Davide Olchini and Anne-Laurence Franzini. The core problem addressed is emerging pandemics, and participatory action research is framed in the One Health approach, which is “an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, and ecosystems”. The sustained partnership of the authors with the community emerges as a relevant feature of the process that enables collaborative co-construction and long-term resilience. In their concluding section the authors frame their efforts in the increasingly visible “indigenous rights movements and their advocacy for culturally responsive research methodologies”, which they argue that represents a significant shift in contemporary research practice. The paper is especially relevant for those action researchers who want to explore how action research can help humanitarian work.

Finally, the special issue ends with the interview to Patricia Canto, researcher at Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness and executive editor in IJAR. Her narrative on how living in different countries helped her develop “an awareness of how it is to be different in different contexts and how that can shape your perspective of things” shows a very nuanced perspective of action research processes.