Official Educational Policy and Action Research in the Era of Crisis: The Case of Greece

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Abstract

The basic aim of this article is to investigate whether and to what extent the institutionalization of action research in the contemporary neo-liberal educational context affects its nature and orientations. So we study in a socio-cultural theoretical framework the way action research was used in basic components of the school reform of 2011 in Greece: in the Program of "School Self-Evaluation" and in the "(Meizon) National Teacher Training" Program. Analyzing the ways action research was used in these institutional texts, we find contradictions between their rhetoric and their hidden discourses and we realize the ways these discourses create a technocratic orientation, which is appropriate for the current neoliberal educational context, but at the same time substantially alters the real nature of action research which is political and emancipatory. Finally, we conclude by proposing ways through which this erosion may be reversed and action research reclaimed, resisting this way to neoliberalism.

Keywords: educational action research, neoliberalism, educational policy, school reform.

Introduction

The main symptoms of the contemporary crisis in education -as manifested in Greece- include the dominance of neoliberal politics and practices and the effort to transform teaching and research into technical enterprises. Regarding curricula, despite their rhetoric, their initial open orientation and the apparent wider framework of educational activity, at the end they focus on specific results of behavioristic type (Katsarou & Tsafos, 2009). Besides, the official texts that turn the basic principles of curricula to substantial directions for teachers and control teaching activities in the classroom, undermine their open orientation. At the same time, the deprofessionalization of teaching is imposed, as managerial techniques and ideologies are prevailing. As far as educational research is concerned, although the strict separation of theory and practice is maintained, qualitative research, and particularly action research, is spreading all over the world, while at the same time it is gradually eroded, being integrated into a technocratic framework and incorporating dominant discourses.

In this article, we claim that in the era of neoliberal globalization (the last three decades for the countries of the western world) the educational policy for primary and secondary (school) education in Greece –mainly expressed by the reform of 2011- seems submitted to the wave of neoliberalization, spread almost worldwide. To prove this submission, we analyze the way(s) action research is used in the specific reform. We decided to analyze action research among all the other components of the reform, as it is a research and teaching methodology that shares no common principles or values with neoliberal policies and ideologies and its recruitment by the reform seems strange and raises questions. At the same time, being action researchers ourselves for many years, we have experienced a serious turn it has taken recently. It is obvious that educational action research has been subject to a subtle process of institutionalization and co-option by mainstream social sciences researchers, government bodies and international organizations, such as the World Bank or OECD, as well as other development agencies. This co-option has brought about serious changes to basic concepts and usual practices of educational action research. They have been radically recontextualized within the discourses employed by these organizations. As a result, action research seems eroded and distorted in such a context (Jordan, 2003, 2009) as it loses basic characteristics and mainly its emancipatory and critical orientation.

In order to achieve our goal and support our argument, we are going first to discuss the basic characteristics of the school reform of 2011 in Greece and then to analyze, in a sociocultural theoretical framework, the way action research was used in it. Particularly, we will focus on how it was used in two basic components of this reform: the Program of "School Self-Evaluation" and the "(Meizon) National Teacher Training" Program. Finally, we will conclude by proposing ways through which this erosion may be reversed and action research reclaimed, resisting this way to neoliberalism.

1. Contemporary official educational policy in Greece

In most western countries including Greece, contemporary educational policy has shaped a centralized institutional framework, seeking total control of the educational process. In the era of neoliberalism and globalization, education seems to revert to the 'effective' modern axioms of homogeneity, standardization, efficiency and rational control of the finished product. The so-called restoration of conservative education policy, the emergence of neoliberal discourse, and conservative political practices (Malewski, 2010: 9; Smith, 2003: 35-38), have restored the simplistic implementation of fixed measurable indicators, instrumentalization and a growing emphasis on management (Gewirtz, 2001). Knowledge and education policy, both curriculum studies and curriculum development and implementation practices, at least at education policy level, are becoming increasingly similar throughout the world (Anderson-Levitt, 2008: 363) despite ostensible differences.

It is claimed that the educational reform of 2011 in Greece followed the homogenizing and assimilationist tendencies of the globalized neoliberal educational policy mentioned above (Gounari & Grollios, 2012; Traianou, 2013). These tendencies manifest: deprofessionalization of teaching (with no opportunity to teachers for taking professional decisions and expressing their practical wisdom), viewing teaching as a technical endeavor and the curriculum as a final product, a prescription or a guide for teachers with good recipes for achieving pre-specified goals. Of course, the educational reform was expressed in a particularly progressive and attractive discourse, reflecting the change of meaning that neoliberalism imposes. Its main slogans were: 'The New School' and 'The Student first', apparently modeled after the American "No Child Left Behind" Act. Besides, it is presented, like many other educational reforms all around the world, as an attempt to upgrade the quality of education, which will enable the regeneration of the nation, the enhancement of all essential components (curricula, teaching methods, teachers' social status, digital technology, etc.) and also the development of all children, without exception (Zhang, 2013).

2. Action Research and the educational reform of 2011

2.1. Action Research: defining the term

Action research (AR) is an alternative approach to teaching and learning and an alternative and non-positivist approach to mainstream social and educational research. At the same time, it is a conception clearly subversive of neoliberal principles and policies. As a term, action research is used interchangeably, and often loosely, by researchers to denote any of a range of research methodologies that have participation of subjects as their focus. There is no definitive or pure model of AR, but there are versions of it across a broad spectrum of approaches to participatory research (Somekh, 2011).

Historically, its basic principles are (Pine, 2009): a) the dialogical relationship between theory and practice, b) the assumption that knowledge and understanding are generated from practice and experience, within the everyday world, c) practitioners' (e.g. teachers') participation in the process, co-operation, empowerment and orientation towards the improvement of educational practice to the benefit of all children. Particularly in its critical version, its ultimate goal is social change towards democracy and social justice (Kemmis, 1993). This gives action research a strong political orientation, making it fight social inequalities endemic to capitalist societies. However, in its initial stages (during the decades of 1950-60) in the context of the positivist approach, AR also had a technocratic form, referred to in the literature as technical action research (Grundy, 1987).

2.2. Relating AR with the educational reform of 2011: a strange combination

What has such an approach to do with the school reform of 2011 in Greece as outlined above? It seems that this reform 'discovered' action research, making two direct and explicit references to it in its official texts. The first connects AR with school self-evaluation and improvement and the second with a wide range teachers' training program.

More specifically, "self-evaluation aims at developing an evaluation culture at school that introduces and establishes the implementation of action research for the production of educational evidence and the development of Action Plans to improve the quality of the educational work of both the school unit and the classroom" (Ministry of Education/ Institute of Educational Policy, 2012: 4-5). And "the contribution of the Meizon Teacher Training Program to the development of the "National Framework for Teacher Training" can be summarized at four main levels: [...] at the methodology of training: linking theory to practice, action research, reflection" (Pedagogical Institute, 2011: 19).

It is obvious –and perhaps surprising- that AR, a cooperative and democratic inquiring process characterized by participation of all key stakeholders in education, but institutionalized and widely disseminated during the last two decades, was related to this educational reform that promoted measures that can be characterized –according to Apple (1990)- neoliberal, in the sense that are centered around the economy, performance objectives, and market and paid work. Such measures were (Traianou, 2013): the introduction of an optional fourth year apprenticeship route in the vocational secondary education which aimed to strengthen further the links between the school and the local labor market and was equivalent to unpaid work for a year in local businesses, the reduction of the weekly teaching hours of various subjects, in order to create a 'reserve pool' of teachers who can be reallocated to other schools (both secondary and primary) and teachers with a 'light' workload in their present schools could be asked to 'deliver' teaching in up to four schools. Although the reform was promoted as an educational innovation, with the respective pedagogic slogans, the actual practices that followed (central design of a national curriculum and innovation to be imposed in top down manner, technical rationality of professionalism, etc.) and the direct link between education and economic growth (effectiveness, quantitative criteria and national exams), determined a technocratic and restrictive framework for educational practice. In this context, these restrictions were associated with the need for effectiveness, aiming at overcoming the economic crisis. It is characteristic what Anna Diamantopoulou, Minister of Education stated in 2011 (in Traianou, 2013: 87): 'The multifaceted and multi-layered crisis that we experience can become the catalyst for change of our enduring problems. I am deeply convinced that the time has come. The Prime Minister [George Papandreou] has put education as the dominant priority of the national plan for the regeneration of the country. We change education, we change Greece: to change our educational system, to change attitudes, to change Greece'. AR and its basic concepts, such as *improvement*, *development* and *empowerment,* are used by a neoliberal educational reform, during the severe economic crisis in Greece, raising the following questions:

- How AR and its concepts were used in the educational reform of 2011? and more specifically,
- How they were used in the school self-evaluation program and in the (Meizon) National Teacher Training Program?
- What is exactly the meaning of AR and of the related concepts in the context of the specific educational reform? The discussion on these issues may help us to raise and address a crucial final question that can deepen our understanding of the emerging contradiction:
- How does neoliberalism reattribute meaning to these concepts and subsequently to AR?

3. *Our inquiry*

3.1. **Methodology and material for analysis**

In our effort to answer the above mentioned questions, we conducted a qualitative analysis of the official texts of the reform trying to find how the discourse of action research is re-contextualized by this reform. More specifically, we focused on understanding what basic concepts of AR (like participation, co-operation, research, improvement) mean in the context of this reform. Moreover, we were interested in understanding what kind of knowledge is produced through the form of action research promoted by this reform and who benefits from its production.

The official texts that were analyzed:
- Ministry of Education/Institute of Educational Policy (2012). *Evaluation of the School Unit: the self-evaluation process. Self-evaluation at a glance* (SSE1)
- Ministry of Education/Institute of Educational Policy (2012). *Evaluation of the School Unit: the self-evaluation process. Methodology and tools* (SSE2)
- Pedagogical Institute (2011). *Meizon Teachers' Training Project: frame of reference* (MTTP1)

- Pedagogical Institute (2012). *Meizon Teachers' Training Project: training material – Group-work in the classroom* (MTTP2)

All these materials were analyzed using socio-cultural approach with the following fundamental principles (Wertsch, 1991):

- The socio-cultural context mediates and determines how a person / or a group of people perceives the world (a phenomenon or a concept).
- The symbolic systems, particularly language, and methods / tools available from culture are very important for meaning making. These systems can also change the context.
- The phenomena (e.g. action research) are considered as processes in constant change and can be better understood when studied in their historical evolution.

We consider that socio-cultural approach better serves our inquiry purpose, as we view AR as a human action that takes place in a cultural context, mediated by symbolic systems, mainly by language, which shape it. So we draw on data from the official texts mentioned above, having in mind that these policy texts reflect and (re)produce broader ideological interests, emerging social formations and/or educational practices. Institutions, like education, have specific meanings and values that are expressed in language in systematic ways (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). In this theoretical framework, there is a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event (e.g. a policy text) and the situation(s) and the institution that generated it. Therefore, from a discursive point of view, it is important to identify those patterns in the texts that contribute to the creation of new power relations, and give shape to a new educational reality, signaling new practices that are not necessarily explicit.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Understanding the school self-evaluation Program: its rhetoric and hidden discourses

In the reform under study, school self-evaluation program is explicitly integrated into the wider demands for "school improvement, school effectiveness, school autonomy, school accountability and evidence based educational policy" (SSE2: 5). So it is outlined as a decentralized evaluation process that stands for accountability of local educational stakeholders on the basis of criteria and goals, which at first glance seem they could be collectively set at school level, but which in fact are centrally pre-specified by the state, so as to ensure school effectiveness. Indicatively, both the quality indicators and the evaluation criteria reached schools pre-determined (SSE1: 14). As Vekris (2014) pointed out, the fact that the main axes of school self-assessment program were imposed 'top-down' did not protect the actual process developed at schools from the risks pointed out by the official text, namely: bureaucratic treatment of the whole process, creation of internal conflicts, focus on pointless issues and intensity of introversion.

Although the program stresses with emphasis its bottom-up approach to the introduction of the innovation (SSE1: 5) and highlights the fact that this approach "is much more effective than the top-down, centralized one, attempted previously" (SSE2: 19), in fact its basic components were offered ready to schools to be implemented in practice. Thus, it operated within a vertical structure, providing input for the operation of a 'hierarchical internal evaluation', in which higher hierarchy had an extended coordinating role. So the Institute of Educational Policy, an organization close connected to the Ministry of Education, controlled the whole procedure, thus offering the Program a technical character. The focus on numeral facts and descriptive data makes this technical interest clear, along with the absolute absence of any evaluative criteria that could concern the educational context that contribute to the development of certain procedures at school or produce certain results (outputs). It is characteristic that in the table with the evaluation criteria (SSE1: 14) there is no criterion that concerns the social and cultural parameters that affect the educational process or the relationships with the family and the community, axes that could stimulate the school community to understand and discuss the political dimension of the educational process. Moreover in these pre-determined axes there isn't any reference to the curricula or the textbooks, although in Greece there is only one official textbook for each subject in each class. However by studying and evaluating the curricula, teachers could explore the role prescribed for them by the institutional framework, but also their possibilities to highlight the various voices of the students, or how and to what extent the institutional framework indirectly imposes the marginalization of some voices in the classroom (Cook-Sather, 2002: 5). It is obvious that such criteria could make self-evaluation a more political procedure and restrict its technical orientation.

Moreover, being integrated into the general discourse on evaluation and efficiency in neo-liberal terms in the context of the contemporary economic crisis, the program of school self-evaluation failed to convince of its alternative, participative, co-operative, democratic nature and its intentions to enhance education quality. The fact that it was presented as a part of a wider evaluation plan that also included: a) teachers' personal evaluation by the headmaster and the school advisor (already legislated from 2010) and b) the external school evaluation, recontextualized the school self-evaluation program and all the attractive concepts it contained. Therefore, despite the proposal for collective internal evaluation, which could stimulate teachers' interest, participation, creativity and imagination, the process of self-evaluation took on a bureaucratic character.

In the Program of SSE there is also strong focus on documentation. However, this is a documentation that is presented as a process of completing specific ready-made forms, mainly with numbers or short descriptions rather than collection of evidence that could give systematic character to the process and could form a basis for reflection, individual and collective, in the context of the action research undertaken. Indicative of this technocratic view is the following excerpt: "The self-assessment process takes into account evidence from the teacher's portfolio and evidence of the school unit (quantitative and qualitative elements of the educational work produced) which correspond to the following analytical / interpretative categories: School Data, School Procedures, School Results" (SSE1: 13). These categories and its structure remind us of the way a factory works: input, procedures, output.

Another point we consider important to refer to is the dissemination of the results of the self-evaluation process. The program states explicitly that these results "are recorded in the school's evaluation annual report that is uploaded on the Network for SSE and on school's website" (SSE1: 15). But the posting of the results on the Internet for public viewing and their sending to the Institute of Educational Policy, an organization in a superior position compared to school in the educational hierarchy, are conflicting to self-evaluation, especially when considering it related to reflective and giving feedback practices for internal improvement (SSE2: 9-11). Thus, the neoliberal demand for accountability seems stronger than reflection.

3.2.2.   Understanding the Meizon Teacher Training Program: its rhetoric and hidden discourses

Regarding the other program, (Meizon) National Teacher Training Program, an alternative training model was promoted based on active participation of the trainees in the procedures, strong social interactions in communities of learning, direct implementation of training experience in the classrooms, flexibility of the training activities (MTTP1: 7). Methodologically the Program is supported by methods of adult education (group-work, activities based on lived experience, case-studies, role-playing, dialogic techniques), of distance learning and of action research (reflection, collaborative construction of knowledge, critical implementation of interventions in the classroom) (MTTP1: 9,19). Its innovative elements included 'deliberations with educational, social and scientific bodies', 'investigation of training needs', as well as 'active participation of learners (here: the participating teachers)', who are called 'to become co-creators of educational material, utilizing the invaluable experience they have as education practitioners…' (MTTP1: 5-6).

However, in the framework of the specific program training material was designed strictly prescribed in terms of form and content. Six huge volumes with training material for almost all subjects taught at school are available online (http://www.epimorfosi.edu.gr/). So, this material, supporting the training process, consists of "good practices" and "teaching scenarios" to be implemented in classroom, implying that teaching is perceived by the reform as mere implementation and undermining the reflective nature of training and teaching process that is highlighted in the official texts as mentioned above. Besides, the whole training process led to a Teacher Training Certificate, after the completion of three essays that involved 'teaching scenarios' and feedback from the trainer. In fact, this process could lead –under specific presuppositions- to a participatory teachers' training process based on interaction that would take into account teaching practice and its interconnection with theory. However, as the teacher's support process is unclear and the necessary cooperative and reflective framework on the basis of equal communication is not clearly defined by the Program, the process is likely to follow the dominant and usual training practice: the teacher is trying to apply tested scientific techniques learned during the training process and taught by an expert trainer, who is specialist in theory. Such a training condition ensures that the process follows the logic of covering gaps/deficits and treating teaching as a production technology.

Moreover, we have to mention the fact that, although a wide quantitative research was conducted –in the framework of MTTP- in order to map the educational needs for teachers' training, it was performed in a socio-cultural and ideological vacuum.

It avoided crucial issues, like the unequal social relations in school, condition that led to technical educational analysis and prohibited the development of any transformative intervention in education and real change (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Thus, it seems that the initial announcements of MTTP for critical approaches to teaching were soon forgotten. Therefore, neither the developed procedures nor the resulting qualifications for the participant teachers followed a developmental and reflective-critical rationale, despite initial announcements to the contrary. A teachers' training framework with "good practices" as basic educational material and a specialized trainer, who provided judgment and feedback, as a point of reference, along with the absence of political conditions of teaching do not favor the development of a reflective environment that could give educators the leading role in the training process.

3.2.3. The conflicting discourses of the reform under study

Another interesting point we have to refer to is that both "School self-evaluation" Program and the "Meizon Teacher Training" Program were directly related to the concept of the school as a 'learning organization' (for both pupils/students and teachers) by the specific reform (SSE2: 6-9). At first glance, "school as learning organization" appears to be a rather positive concept; but we have to think how learning is conceived in the specific concept. By studying the official texts carefully, we can see that learning processes are viewed as technical activities which can be measured and monitored through various standardized tools and enhanced by targeted professional development programs for teachers. This is a basic characteristic of neoliberalism, failing to recognize the complexity and dynamics of the processes related to human growth and learning (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009). Besides, 'the learning organization concept emphasizes productivity, efficiency and competitive advantage at the expense of the worker' (Fenwick, 1998: 151 in Jordan, 2003: 191).

In the same reform, both in SSE program and in the MTT Program, we observed increased use of the 'team concept', through terms like 'collective procedures', 'co-operation', 'peer-evaluation', and the assumed benefits it provides. Yet, as studies such as Rinehart et al. (1997, in Jordan, 2003) have shown, the team concept in the workplace -usually in neoliberal contexts- implies intensification of the labor process, greater stress through multi-tasking, and burn-out among workers (here: teachers). So learning organization and team work can become metaphors for a myriad of behaviors, values, practices and forms of social organization that support and legitimate the social relations of accumulation under neo-liberalism. Another example of what we are referring to here could include the concept of social inclusion as social assimilation of every difference.

3.2.4. The use of AR by the reform

Another interesting finding is that the reform proposed action research 'as a useful tool for change and improvement at school level. It would produce useful educational evidence and develop plans for action that improve the quality of education provided at the school and at the classroom' (SSE1: 5). It is apparent that the reform focused on the technical characteristics of action research, neglecting its critical and emancipatory character, as there is no reference to it (Vekris, 2014), despite the attractive and democratic rhetoric of the reform. Obviously, technical action research is utilized, resulting in throughput implementation. However, focusing on the technical and neglecting the political nature of action research means a deliberate exclusion of crucial questions about the social and ideological context in which the school operates. For instance, educational outcomes would be studied independently from the students' social and cultural background, or the curriculum content independently from the social, linguistic and cognitive learning needs of socially differentiated students. Besides, we have to analyze the discourse of participation that is constructed through the reform texts. At first glance, the impression given is that change can be neither effective nor successful unless local stakeholders are included within the school-evaluation and teachers' training programs. Teachers –according to the reform- become teacher-researchers and reflective practitioners that participate actively in learning, growth (that is empowerment) and change for improvement. However, we must ask how, exactly, participation is defined and organized, what kinds of learning are to be internalized by teachers, what really constitutes improvement and who defines it in the specific reform.

Teachers participated in the procedures in order to achieve pre-specified goals that were beyond the evaluation process, as they were commonly –almost universally- accepted. So what constituted improvement was already decided (though it was not clearly stated in the official texts), before teachers started thinking and discussing about it. We might think that the exact definition of improvement in each case could be given at local level by groups of co-operating teachers. But this was not the case, as the official texts encouraged the teachers to participate by 'getting acquainted with research tools and methodologies and developing relevant skills'.

Of course, such a discourse refers directly to techniques that favor measurements, away from reflective and conversational procedures and complex qualitative research approaches. So participation, though a concept that could easily be bound to empowerment and emancipation, in this reform seems to be bound to technologies of normalization, control and exploitation.

4. Conclusions

As AR was utilized by the specific reform in its technical form, it was used as a tool for maximizing teachers' and schools' productivity and for enacting regimes of social / educational regulation and control. AR was viewed as a method decontextualized from its historical, ethical and political roots. In this way it was reduced to a means, just a tool aiming at producing technical solutions for local educational problems. It is essentially a technocratic exploitation of action research, imposed from the top of the institutional hierarchy -by hierarchically superior organizations- to the school, from those who design educational policy to teachers. However, through this technocratic exploitation, the effectiveness of the adopted policy is tested in practice -if not implicitly imposed- while this policy is not evaluated or questioned regarding its principles or intentions, which are presumed and non-negotiable. Thus, this technical rational does not put into question the institutional framework and the educational policy that is being exercised, nor the dominant discourses though which they are expressed, as these seem to concern the state or the Ministry rather than the teacher-researchers (Groundwater-Smith, 2005: 336). As shown above, AR methodology was adopted by the school reform of 2011 for its unique capacity to co-opt teachers' knowledge and understanding of the educational process to effect paradigm shifts on how to boost productivity and competitiveness, that is on how to achieve pre-specified teaching goals.

It seems that the stripping of AR of its key characteristics and the deconstruction of its political nature, more pronounced in its critical form, a trend manifested during the last decades in all countries of the western world in one way or another, is also evident in Greece in the time of crisis. Through the processes presented above, the reform of 2011 managed to reconstitute approaches to action research within conceptual practices and forms of social organization that were aligned with neoliberalism and articulated with relations of ruling. Neoliberal discourse erodes action research by stripping it of its political and ethical principles and values, and by adding market priorities to it.

While neoliberalism can be viewed as a primary economic philosophy in which free markets are the center-piece, implicit within it is also a system of governmentality whose locus is the individual consumer, not the citizen of postwar social democracy. The transition from the politics of citizen rights to one where everyday life is organized through consumers and market relations has fundamentally recontextualized the discourse of participatory democracy. In the era of neoliberal globalization, action research has increasingly been subject to social, economic and political forces that have either challenged or systematically compromised its legacy, its social origins and radical traditions (Jordan, 2009).

5. Discussion - Proposals for reclaiming action research

After the conclusions reached above, the main question is what can be done to anchor action research to anti-neoliberal modes of knowledge production in the contemporary neoliberal world, where there are underpaid teachers, unmotivated for research within hierarchically and bureaucratically organized structures. In the present circumstances, the first step we can take as action research practitioners is to reflect on the discourse and kinds of methodology that are best suited for (re)constructing AR. Action researchers need to pay close attention to the language and conceptual frameworks they employ to develop their methodology. They have to study and reflect on the subtle effects that the use of mainstream concepts has on the research questions they pose, the research process they construct and their analysis of the contexts they explore (Jordan, 2009). A critical, revitalized AR will need means for unmasking neoliberal hegemonic practices and modes of thought hidden in mainstream discourse. It is research for social change and it is very important to make clear that it challenges and confronts social change as it is envisioned by neoliberalism. In order to invent these means that would protect AR from the co-option of neoliberalism, AR needs to return to critical theory and action researchers to explore and draw on other critical methodologies, like critical ethnography. Such a turn could ensure the integration of political economy within its theoretical and analytic framework, a precondition crucial to the analysis of social phenomena, in the era of globalized capitalism. Moreover, this turn could provide AR with a powerful rationale for its apparently nonconformist approach to social inquiry through the critique developed by critical approaches.

This critique is focused on how mainstream social sciences get implicated in the relations of ruling in our times (Jordan 2003, 2009). Action research has to be (re)constructed as a network-building methodology that could organize grassroots movements. Unlike academic or other institutionalized research, which is increasingly defined by external funding priorities, AR has to arise from immediate struggles that movements and/ or ordinary people are engaged in on an everyday basis. AR can become a form of bottom up networked research that is opposed to neoliberal ideologies. It can be understood as an alternative form of learning and educational organization, a determined political and ethical challenge to the continued marginalization of powerless people in educational contexts (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016). In order to achieve all the above, action researchers need to explore new methods for collecting data, other than the standard interview or questionnaire, e.g. talking circles, narratives and discourse / conversation analysis. This change in methods requires that action researchers must be open to embracing different ontological principles and epistemological standpoints that may conflict with and contradict their own training. They also need to see all these methods they use as highly political constructions bound to societal and historical forces that have shaped them. Besides, they need to pay closer attention to theory that has a political hue and may be oppositional and radical in our times. Such a theory can give a social perspective to the action research project and help action research in general not to be swallowed by neo-liberalism (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016).

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