Editorial

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On behalf of the editors, I want to thank the authors very much who contributed to this special IJAR issue on the diversity of action research. They have helped us to compile a volume full of rich experiences and promising action research perspectives. Each of the nine articles in this volume deserves careful reading; there is much experience and reflection in each of them. Thanks again to the authors!

Out of the rich bunch of experiences and reflections the authors provided us so generously, I want to highlight just one argument:

“Again and again”, we wrote in our call for papers to this issue, “we find that mainstream social scientists have little knowledge about, and no experience with, action research, but nevertheless they take part in discussions on action research. The consequences are a lot of misunderstandings and/or silence between mainstream social scientists and action researchers”. Any action researcher will have experienced this, time and again.

Though there are some few exceptions, special training institutions and courses for action research are still largely absent.¹ As a consequence nearly all action researchers have once been educated in methods of conventional social science, and they have been taught – as Øyvind Pålshaugen points out in his introduction – “what is to be regarded as scientific behaviour when undertaking a research process”. Action research practice, especially intervention into the field, is of course not in line with the criteria of conventional so-

¹ How to train action research, already existing examples, the difficulties to train action researchers in academic contexts, the possibilities to create appropriate institutions for systematic broad action research training and last not least methodological reflections on training concepts will be the focus of one of the following thematic IJAR issues. If anyone wants to contribute: Draft outlines are welcome.
cial science. This leads to a situation in which action researchers sometimes understand their research practice as “deviant behaviour” (introduction, page 10), while mainstream social scientists tend to regard them as outsiders. Many action researchers will have experienced such attitudes. Sometimes the pressure from mainstream social science is strong enough to weaken many an action researcher’s professional self confidence as a social scientist.

In this context the question Olav Eikeland raises in this volume is interesting. “Why should mainstream social science researchers be interested in action research?” is the title of his article (this issue, p. 38-64). Eikeland’s answer is based on a methodological argument: “Methodology”, he says, “is built on the self-reflections of the research community, founded on the community members’ long-term, practically acquired experience from doing research, i.e. as research practitioners…. Methodological knowledge is ‘actionable’, practical knowledge produced as such by practitioners… This method of methodology is not subordinating research to any practice. It is putting the research practice at the very centre of attention and at the very centre of every practice” (p. 52). He continues (p. 53): “Hard core action research is … collective self-reflection”, i.e. self-reflection of research practitioners about their research experiences and practices. This is exactly why mainstream social science should be interested in action research: “Mainstreamers are not always as meticulous as they should be in their own discipline of methodology, however, to say nothing about their accuracy in the methods of methodology” (p. 53).

Conclusion: Action research as self-reflective practice is the core of social science research.

To check this, the reader may take as an example, among others from this volume, Marianne Kristiansen’s article on “Relational and existential challenges of practicing dialogic action research” (this volume, p. 15-37). It is her

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2 This is but one dimension of action research, Eikeland is discussing in his article. Another one is concerned with Kurt Lewin’s dictum that things have to be changed in order to understand them, which Eikeland proposes to modify into “in order to understand anything you have to practice. You have to go native” instead of intervening from outside as an outsider (p. 62), following the 400 years old logics of natural science experiments in the tradition of Bacon and others.
great capacity to engage in processes of collective reflection and self-reflection that made her encounter what she calls the social concrete block in an organization: a social phenomenon that – as far as I can see – has not been described before in any conventional social science research report. This is not an accident: Social concrete blocks are “invisible” to (i.e. cannot be identified or analyzed by) conventional research methods.