Research Responses to Practical Challenges: What Can Action Research Contribute?

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During the last decade a major practical turn in research in general has been identified and made subject to discussion. One consequence is a growing interest in what action research can offer in this context. It is a mistake to assume that action research can produce theories of the same kind as conventional research but which are, in some way or other, more practical. The core contributions of action research pertain to how practical challenges are identified, and to how knowledge is made actionable through dialogically structured processes of interplay between research and practical actors. This, however, is not enough. Only when each dialogic process is able to grow in quality and number of actors involved, is the process able to verify its own power as a democratic mechanism.

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Introduction

When research started to make itself felt as a force in society, largely in the nineteenth century, research was a small establishment. Appearing as an elitist community, research tended to see itself as representing reason and rationality against a society generally characterised by tradition, ignorance and even outright stupidity. The ability to represent reason was dependent on the ability of research to itself stay out of this society, to become involved would