Action research
and the study of human being

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Despite the openness of action research to engage with several philosophical movements from the 20th century, there does not seem to be as much engagement with existentialist thought. I try to point out and further articulate certain affinities that I see between action research and existentialist philosophy. I suggest that action research can gain from exploring these connections. Based on the existentialist perspective, I compare action research and more standard social science. In particular, I use Heidegger’s notions of “das Man” and an “existentialist essence” of human being as a key to bringing out these differences and for suggesting ways in which action research may capitalize on such differences.

Keywords: existentialism, Heidegger, authenticity, action research, social science

1. Introduction

In this essay I would like to raise and address some philosophical issues implied by the style of social research and inquiry called “action research” (AR). It may seem odd to propose a philosophical investigation into a research tradition explicitly characterized by action, pragmatism, and real world engagement. Philosophy is supposed to be a discipline that deals with abstract and abstruse issues divorced from action and real life. In fact, this has not always been the case. Toulmin (1990), for example, has argued that this is only a certain path that philosophy got sidetracked with around the time of Descartes, and that 20th Century figures like Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Rorty have paved the way for a return to practical philoso-