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**ACTION
RESEARCH
LITERATURE**

Action research literature

Themes and trends

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ABSTRACT

Recent action research books are reviewed. I give attention to books on appreciative inquiry, action science, systems approaches and action learning. Community, health, education and organizational applications are included. Major action research journals are noted. Based on this literature I identify a number of current trends: the growth of action research and especially appreciative inquiry; an increasing sense of community among action researchers; and growing attention to the practical details of participation and involvement. I question the absence of more material on building theory from action research, and on action research and complexity.

KEY WORDS

- action research literature
- action learning
- action science
- appreciative inquiry
- journals
- trends

425

A metre and a quarter of shelf space in my office is crammed with books on action research (AR) and related topics. All are relatively recent, accumulated in preparation for this review. Another shelf contains recent journals. My hard disk carries electronic articles. Where do I start? A review even of some of this is a massive task. I've chosen to focus on works which I've found personally useful or thought-provoking or which point towards present and future issues. Clearly, this is a subjective judgment. Omission is not necessarily an indication of either quality or relevance.

Most of the material reviewed here has appeared since the publication of the *Handbook of action research* (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Marking a turning point in the development of AR, the handbook made quality an issue both as a topic and through the quality of its chapters. It was ecumenical – under the label 'AR' it gathered together in friendly conjunction a variety of approaches sometimes known to proclaim their differences. 'Action research' has been retrieved as a label of preference for this family of processes and mindsets. This journal, with the same editors, promises to build further on that success.

I begin with an overview of recent appreciative inquiry (AI). This is followed by action science, systems approaches and action learning (AL). The bulk of the remaining text is organized under headings of some common applications. Relevant journals are identified. Finally I attempt to identify some trends and needs.

Appreciative inquiry

Sorensen, Yaeger and Bengtsson (2003) note that AI has had a dramatic impact on the practice of organizational change. In 350 reviewed articles there was much evidence of success in many different settings.

The growth in AI literature is no less impressive. It might reasonably have an entire review to itself. A brief and recent sample can start with the *Appreciative inquiry handbook* by David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney and Jacqueline Stavros (2003). It is a detailed account, often workbook-style. Its many resources include 'mini-lectures'; detailed process descriptions; examples of worksheets; and more.

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) have authored a practical and informative introduction to AI suitable for novices. They provide an account of the eight principles, a brief history, and a chapter each on the main phases of the '4 Ds': Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny, AI's version of the AR cycle. The same authors with Cooperrider and Kaplan (Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom & Kaplan, 2002) have written an *Encyclopedia of positive questions*.

From Jim Ludema and his colleagues (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffin, 2003) comes a detailed description of an AI summit for whole-system change.

Their very readable book is structured around a typical sequence of events from earliest planning to post-summit follow-up. Throughout it is clear and informative. Copious examples illustrate the various stages.

Birth of a global community (Gibbs & Mahé, 2003) provides a detailed and sometimes inspiring account of the birth of the United Religions Initiative. AI was the methodology chosen to set up URI, a global interfaith organization.

The current popularity of AI is evidenced by a new book series *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*. David Cooperrider and Michel Avital (2004) are editors both for the first book in the series and the series as a whole. The first book sets a high standard with in-depth explorations of AI and some applications. The applications include knowledge management (Avital & Carlo, 2004), pedagogy (Yballe & O'Connor, 2004) and program evaluation (Norum, Wells, Hoadley, Geary & Thompson, 2004) among others.

The American Evaluation Association has brought out a welcome addition (Preskill & Coghlan, 2003) to its *New directions for evaluation* series. An overview (Coghlan, Preskill & Catsambas, 2003) introduces four AI case studies. Experienced evaluators then offer a critique. Patricia Rogers and Dugan Fraser (2003) analyse the cases with a mix of affirmation and scepticism. Michael Patton (2003) places appreciative evaluation in its wider context. While less sanguine about it than its practitioners he concludes that it is a useful addition to evaluation methods.

Critique in the AI literature is rare but can be found. Bushe and Khamisa (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 20 AI cases. All 20 began with positive questions and followed the 4D model and principles. Only seven achieved transformational change. All seven resulted in 'a generative metaphor that transformed the accepted beliefs' of participants (2004, p. 1).

Mathie and Cunningham (2003) describe their own form of AI, Asset Based Community Development. There are also other AI-like approaches, though claiming a different provenance. One is the 'solutions focus' (Jackson & McKergow, 2002). Another is 'positive organizational scholarship' (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003).

AI is an espoused affirmative approach. Ironically, those who write about it nevertheless often have difficulty being affirmative about other approaches to change. The AI literature, very often evangelical about its own advantages, often dismisses other approaches as deficit-oriented or problem-solving. I prefer to think of AI as one very useful addition to a number of change options.

Action science

Chris Argyris continues with his pursuit of double loop learning and its attainment in practice. In *Reasons and rationalizations* (Argyris, 2004) he returns to a

theme of his earlier writing (for instance, Argyris 1972), the inadequacy of much social research. Now he draws on the insights which seem to have come from his collaboration with Don Schön (beginning with Argyris & Schön, 1974). He uses the same forms of argument and evidence with which he has already challenged organizations (Argyris & Schön, 1978) and consultants (Argyris, 1985). This time his target is social researchers.

In this tightly argued and sometimes terse book he claims that social researchers (like everyone else) show skilled incompetence in the way they avoid practising what they preach. Applying this model to academics he makes a strong claim for the importance of 'implementable validity' as an important but often ignored research goal.

For those who find his books difficult, a recent article (Argyris, 2003) covers similar ground. For added interest it is placed in the historical context of his own learning: his own vigorous search for understanding and rigour in his work. To glimpse how much his approach differs from much other research, contrast Argyris (2000) with Van de Ven (2000). Then read Michael Beer's (2000) commentary on both papers. Evert Gummesson (2000) also draws heavily on action science in his book on qualitative organizational research.

Systems approaches

The action researchers I know well are systems thinkers of a sort. They believe that almost everything affects almost everything else. For engaging with communities and organizations reductionism is seldom an appropriate choice.

Checkland's soft systems methodology, SSM, brought some welcome depth of analysis to AR as a methodology. Now retired, in 1999 he reissued his 1990 book, *Soft systems methodology in action* (Checkland & Scholes, 1990) in its original form but prefaced by a '30-year retrospective' to bring his views up to date.

Recent books which include material on SSM include *Tools for thinking*, by Checkland's colleague Mike Pidd (2003), and Michael Jackson's (2003) *Systems thinking*. The first of these treats management science as problem solving, modelling as valuable, and SSM as one of the analytic tools for problem solving.

Jackson's well-argued book provides a lucid summary and largely sympathetic critique of SSM. It contains similarly clear accounts of other systems methodologies. There is a worthwhile section on Critical Systems Practice, an AR meta-methodology. If I were to choose only one book on systems approaches to AR this would be it. Let me also mention in passing two somewhat earlier books in this field which I found informative and useful: Midgley (2000) and Flood (1999). Both are practical yet penetrating.

Action learning

Skills learned in workshops do not transfer easily to the world beyond. This was already known when Baldwin and Ford (1988) reviewed the literature. It has also been a more recent emphasis: Holton and Baldwin (2003). A chapter there by Lyle Yorks (2003) offers action learning (AL) as a possible strategy for improving transfer. In AL, as in AR, the learning happens where and when it is needed. The difficulty of learning transfer perhaps accounts for the recent growth of AL programs in organizations. Recent examples of the growing literature are by Mike Marquardt (2004) and Joe Raelin (2003).

Without ignoring theory, Marquardt concentrates on a practical approach to leadership development using AL in the North American style. He gives prominent attention to the role of the 'set advisor' (whom he calls 'coach') in setting up AL groups ('sets'). He assumes that most learning sets share a single problem or project.

Raelin's preferred term for AL is 'work-based learning', the title of an earlier book (2000). His 2003 book can be read as an account of turning a work team into a learning set. His goal is for every employee to be a leader. He describes how that might be done.

The British style of AL is described in a normative article by Verna Willis (2004). She sets out criteria by which faithfulness to Revans' original approach might be judged. Revans (1998[1978]) favoured separate projects for each participant and minimal facilitation.

Also in the British mode, Ian McGill and Anne Brockbank (2004) are more encyclopaedic in their coverage. The result is a good source of information on different varieties and different applications of AL. It offers a broader perspective on AL at the cost of increased density. It does contrive to cover practice and theory.

It is a puzzle that the AL and AR literatures don't overlap more. It's true that Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt has treated them as related for some time and continues (2002) to do so. Other examples such as the edited books by Sandra Speedy (2003) and Shankar Sankaran and his colleagues (2001) tend to be associated with people who are linked to ALARPM, the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association.

Community

Joyce Epstein and others (2002) take as their focus the creation of school-community partnerships. They identify ways in which such partnerships can be formed. I would have liked a little more theory but enjoyed the practical detail. There are questionnaires, pages which can be used to create overhead projections, and useful 'recipes'.

I agree with Brenton Faber (2002) when he describes community development and organizational change as related. He describes himself as an academic consultant in a book which is autobiographical, practically relevant, and engaging enough for bedtime reading. *Knowing poverty* (Brock & McGee, 2002) describes the use of participatory methods for poverty reduction. The lessons which the authors draw from their experience have wider application.

A growing literature explains how participatory methods can involve people who are not fully literate. A copiously-illustrated example is *Planning for country* (Walsh & Mitchell, 2002) describing participatory approaches used with indigenous people in northern Australia. I can envisage using some of the processes in other settings.

Robyn Munford and Jackie Sanders (2003) have edited a book which describes the use of participatory AR to help families. Many of the included case studies are with indigenous people. Without making light of the difficulties of family research and change the book presents useful strategies and informative case studies. If you don't look at the rest of the book, I recommend the chapter on empowerment-based evaluation by Raven and others (2003).

Participatory community research (Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor & Davis, 2004) deals with recent community psychology. The second chapter by Balcazar and others (2004) is on participatory AR. Other chapters deal with issues which include partnerships, power sharing and stakeholder perspectives. The book as a whole and many of its chapters, all based on experience, encourage applied and participatory research. Chapter 12 (Van der Eb et al.) is worth special mention. In just over five pages it identifies some community concerns about participation and some issues which deserve attention. (For a sceptical look at participation see also Cooke & Kothari, 2001.)

The curiously-named *Wheelbarrows full of frogs* (Leeuwis & Pyburn, 2002) addresses social learning in rural community development. An index would have been a welcome addition. Instead I used the introduction to decide which chapters were worth further attention. Practical examples provide a useful leavening for a largely academic approach.

Several of the books address the relationship between policy and practice and how it can be two-way. The chapter by Canavan, Dolan & Pinkerton in Munford and Sanders (2003) and the book by Brock & McGee (2002) are relevant.

Health

Community based participatory research for health is edited by Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein (2003). The chapters talk of CBPR or community-based participatory research. The descriptions and the introduction by the editors

signal that it is AR re-badged. Wide ranging and informative chapters include Bradbury & Reason, and Randy Stoecker's 'Are academics irrelevant?'. From his own experience Stoecker offers some advice to academics about how they might become relevant.

There was enough balance between theory and practice to keep my interest. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of authors who were willing to look at the disadvantages as well as the advantages of their approach. An appendix of resources adds to the book's usefulness. The chapters I found most relevant were in Part 2, on power and trust (including Stoecker's paper), and Part 4, on methodology and ethics. In Part 4, Jane Springett has a chapter on issues in participatory evaluation.

I often recommend Ernie Stringer's earlier book on community AR (1999) to people for its simple and accessible language. The same qualities are evident in *Action research in health* (Stringer & Genat, 2004). Using the same AR cycle of 'look, think, act' it emphasizes research rigour and the human aspects of participation and involvement. Concepts and processes are well integrated. There are many illustrations and examples. Don't be put off by the title; it has relevance beyond health. It's occasionally more prescriptive than I would prefer (for simplicity of expression, I suspect). In other respects it's eclectic. There is a strong emphasis on participation and communication. Acceptance of other research approaches is evident. So too is the authors' openness to both academic and public knowledge.

Loretta Bellman (2003; Bellman, Bywood & Dale, 2003) chose critical AR for improving clinical nursing practice. Her style is narrative, with thick description interleaved with verbatim records. There is a strong emphasis on direct involvement of the nurses and their 'patients', as Bellman calls them.

Rigour is well attended to. There is careful triangulation of data. Theoretical and methodological literatures inform the study. Theory is used to challenge and be challenged by practice. The evolving nature of AR practice is well documented. The issue of power, often neglected, is given the attention its importance warrants. The result is to demonstrate that AR and evidence-based practice go well together.

One discipline which has mostly ignored AR is psychology, at least in the English-speaking world. In the US, Britain and Australia there is a strong commitment to what is called the 'scientist-practitioner' model of professional training. In theory this favours integrated theory and practice – AR would fit well. (It does fit well. I used it effectively in almost 30 years of academic classroom work.) Yet much psychological research remains solidly based on experiments, quasi-experiments and quantitative surveys.

There may be glimmers of change. French, Reynolds and Swain (2001), writing for therapists, describe AR as relevant to clinical audit (Chapter 18) and for satisfying demands for evidence-based practice. Encouragingly, there is a further literature, small but growing, on qualitative research in psychology. Lucy

Yardley has had a hand in editing two recent books: Camic, Rhodes and Yardley (2003) and Marks and Yardley (2004). It may be propitious that the first of these was published by the American Psychological Association, a strong supporter of the scientist-practitioner model.

In the first of these books Michelle Fine and colleagues (2003) describe the use of participatory AR with women in prison. In the second, Ballinger, Yardley and Payne (2004) deal with structured observation, participant observation and AR. This seemingly strange juxtaposition works surprisingly well. It considers the researcher in turn as objective observer; culturally sensitive participant; and finally co-researcher with other participants.

Peter Reason (2003a) presents a neat summary of co-operative inquiry in Jonathan Smith's (2003) *Qualitative psychology*. The underpinning logic is addressed. So too is the human dimension of the relationships and dynamics of a co-operative inquiry group.

Of slightly earlier vintage is the *Handbook for action research in health and social care* by Richard Winter and Carol Munn-Giddings (2001). A very eclectic undertaking, it examines the many contexts and varieties of AR. It first came to my attention because of a section on AR and critical realism. Since I encountered Roy Bhaskar's (1978) philosophy of critical realism I have believed this to be a fruitful alliance.

For those whose curiosity is aroused I recommend Andrew Collier's (1994) introduction to critical realism. I found it much more readable than Bhaskar's own work.

Education

AR has been common in education, especially in the English-speaking world. However, educational AR is a minefield for novice action researchers. AR is so variously defined that it is sometimes hard to know just what form of research is being discussed. The research ranges almost from quasi-experimentation (Sagor, 2000) through cyclic and participatory approaches (Mills, 2003) to the emancipatory approaches of people like Stephen Kemmis (e.g. 2001). I'm awaiting the arrival of the second edition of the favourably reviewed Holly, Arhar and Kasten (in press) to see where it fits on the continuum. The earlier edition (Arhar, Holly & Kasten, 2000) gave attention to the virtues of curiosity, reflection, and a willingness to challenge the status quo.

Much educational AR seems driven by a need to reform the system by beginning in the classroom: see the examples in Meyers and Rust (2003). The included paper by Warikoo demonstrates skilful use of a range of data-collection methods. All six case studies are interesting and competently done. Selected as they were from a much larger body of research perhaps this is not surprising.

Jeffrey Glanz (2003) aims his book at educational leaders. He defines AR too broadly for my taste, though I did like some features. He incorporates the principles and practices of general semantics into his account. (GS is not so much about semantics as about thinking. It has influenced my practice ever since I came across Hayakawa's 1952 account of it.) He emphasizes the importance of reflection and of expecting the unexpected.

Shoshana Keiny (2002) comments that much educational change is mechanistic. Instead she urges the use of a more 'ecological' approach, giving examples which often use an AR methodology. Other recent books worth at least a skim include Parsons and Brown (2002), Day and colleagues (2002) and Armstrong and Moore (2004). The third of these gives much attention to the participative aspects of AR. I also thought it acknowledged the fluidity and responsiveness of AR well.

It remains to be seen what effect the *No child left behind* (2001) legislation will have on educational AR in the United States. In that bill the word 'research' is almost always preceded by the phrase 'scientifically-based', defined as research which:

> is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments. (*No child left behind*, 2001, Section 9101 (37))

The legislation stirred up a response which occupied most of the first two issues of the journal *Qualitative Inquiry* in 2004. Yvonna Lincoln and Gaile Cannella set the tone, treating the legislation as evidence of a larger programme of methodological conservatism. There is evidence that US education is responding to the legislation. The American Educational Research Association chose 'Accountability for educational quality' as the theme for its 2003 conference (Atkinson, 2004).

I really enjoyed reading *Action for social justice in education* by Morwenna Griffiths (2003). I liked it for the lucidity and warmth of expression, for the skilful mix of theory and practice, and for the glimpses of the author which can be seen throughout the book. It is respectful of the people it refers to or cites. It is permeated with the values of social justice which it addresses. The phrase 'action research' doesn't occur very often in the book. The participative and egalitarian mindset which underpins AR is evident on almost every page. So is the action orientation.

Organizations

An apparent sparsity of literature might suggest that organizational AR is neglected. However, this is a misleading impression. Some of the books mentioned under education are about organizational change. So is much of the appreciative

inquiry literature. Other works also focus directly on the corporate world. For novices I think a good starting point is provided by David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick (2001). Early chapters discuss some foundational ideas. Later chapters deal in practical ways with issues faced by action researchers doing their research within their own organization. As someone who is almost entirely an outsider, I nevertheless found it informative. A second edition (in press) is expected soon.

Werner Fricke and Peter Totterdill (2004) continue the tradition of fine (and increasingly expensive) books in the series *Dialogues on Work and Innovation*, often dealing with Scandinavian studies. In the Scandinavian fashion much of the research is large in scale, spanning multiple organizations and reflecting the Scandinavian interest in participation and industrial democracy. Other recent and worthwhile books in the series include Gustavsen, Finne and Oscarsson (2001) and Levin (2002).

A Scandinavian flavour is also discernable in the book edited by Adler, Shani and Styhre (2004), sponsored by a consortium of companies and other organizations. The book's four parts address the challenges faced by modern organizations, possible collaborative responses, case studies, and a final summary. Each of Parts 1 to 3 is followed by two commentaries, one by an academic and the other by an executive. Most of the chapters in the book display this same attention to theory and practice.

This is as good a place as any to mention the book on search conferences from Robert Rehm and his colleagues (Rehm, Cebula, Ryan & Large, 2002). The best known exercise of this type is probably future search (Weisbord & Janoff, 2000). Less known, though one of Weisbord's acknowledged sources, is a similar process originating with Eric Trist and Fred Emery (Weisbord & Janoff, 2000) and further developed by Merrelyn Emery (1999). It is now known as 'search conference'. After a brief overview Rehm et al. describe a search conference in some detail. An extended case study is included. There are valuable chapters on what to do before and afterwards. Half a dozen smaller case studies conclude the book. The book stays close to the Emery approach, even using the Emery's job design approach and principles (Emery & Devane, 1999) to design the search conference process.

The apparent neglect of literature on consulting to small and family businesses isn't illusory. Such businesses tend not to spend scarce funds on consultants or research. The book from Jane Hilburt-Davis and Gibb Dyer (2003) drawing on AR and organization development is therefore welcome.

Action research journals

There are now several journals devoted to AR and related methodologies. They follow, in approximate order of seniority.

Systemic Practice and Action Research (formerly *Systems Practice*) has been operating since 1988. Edited by Bob Flood it is published by Kluwer (www.kluweronline.com). The content is a convenient mix of theory and practice with a systemic orientation. Articles include both case studies and conceptual pieces or a combination of these.

Educational Action Research is published by Triangle journals (www.triangle.co.uk). The full text of its articles now becomes freely available on line one year after publication. A typical issue contains a number of articles, mostly case studies, and a 'theoretical resource'. A recent example of the latter is by Lesley Saunders (2004). Noting the links between creativity and evidence she argues for greater use of web-based technologies for professional development through 'professionals seeking, sharing and creating knowledge and understanding from research-informed practice' [2004, p. 166].

Recent issues of *Concepts and Transformation* have featured a discussion forum in addition to the usual articles. Several authors have responded to Davydd Greenwood's (2002) plaint that AR can do much better than it does. Authors taking part in the ensuing discussion include Gustavsen (2003), Levin (2003), Reason (2003b) and Shotter (2003), among others. I hope to see further discussions like this.

Much of the published AI journal literature is to be found in the *AI Practitioner* (www.aipractitioner.com), a quarterly newsletter. There you will find detailed case studies of the application of AI in many nations and in many different settings.

Action Research (this journal) began only in 2003 and is published by Sage (www.sagepub.com). It currently appears four times a year. It might be hazardous to predict how it might develop in the future. Issues so far have articles on future directions, articles on AR theory and/or practice, and interviews with key thinkers.

At the time of preparing this review I have seen only one issue of *Action Learning: Research and Practice*. It contained refereed articles, accounts of practice, and book reviews. The editor is Mike Pedler, who also edited the book *Action learning in practice*, now in its third edition (Pedler, 2003). The publisher is Carfax, part of the Taylor and Francis group (www.tandf.co.uk).

Participatory Learning and Action (until recently *PLA Notes*) could be included here too. The emphasis is on community and rural development. It is published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (www.iied.org). Most issues are themed; for instance Issue 49, April 2004, is on decentralization and community-based planning. Issues 1–40 are available on line for free download.

Other journals

Other journals carry occasional AR articles. *Qualitative Health Research* has included several articles recently. Jan Morse's editorials each month on some aspect of methodology are a bonus (e.g. 2004). Some of the professions seem particularly open to AR as a methodology. Examples include nursing, for instance the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, and such information technology journals as *Information Systems Journal*.

In fact, information technology has been a field where some careful analysis of AR has appeared. For a recent example see the attempt by Davison, Martinsons and Kock (2004) to define the key principles for what they label 'canonical action research'.

The *European Journal of Marketing* brought out a special issue this year on action research and marketing. Chad Perry and Evert Gummesson (2004) provide an overview, and discuss the forms of action research best suited to marketing. Another special issue on action research is to be found in *Human Resource Planning*. Richard Vosburgh (2003) provides an introduction to the issue. Victoria Marsick and Martha Gephart (2003) compare the other articles in the issue and comment on the style of action research which they exhibit. Later in 2004 there will be a special issue of the journal *Futures* on action research and future studies.

Web sites and on-line journals

On-line journals include *Action Research e-Reports*, maintained by Ian Hughes at the University of Sydney. The focus is broad, with some emphasis on action research for community development. You'll find it on the web at (http://www2.fhs.usyd.edu.au/arow//arer/index.html). *Action Research International*, which I manage, has an open and non-adversarial system of peer review (http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/arihome.html).

Several on-line journals are intended for educators. The *Action Research Exchange* is at http://chiron.valdosta.edu/are/. Gordon Wells edits *Networks*, found at http://education.ucsc.edu/faculty/gwells/networks/. The *Ontario Action Researcher* is a reviewed journal at http://www.nipissingu.ca/oar/. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, a multi-lingual peer-reviewed journal for qualitative research, carries occasional action research (http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-eng.htm).

Action research has a wide web presence. If you search for the phrase 'action research' using Google you'll retrieve almost half a million hits. Fortunately, because of the way Google determines page rankings most of the key sites will appear on the first page or so. Many of those in turn will have links to other sites. I won't therefore list sites here.

What are we to make of this?

The most prominent theme is the dramatic success of AI as a change methodology. AR as a whole is also alive and well and, by several indicators, thriving, enjoying growing use and exposure. The literature – journals and books – is increasing. I've mentioned the substantial web presence. Aided by the web and email there is a growing global community of people who regard each other as colleagues. AR has been extending its reach into different disciplines and professions. Nursing and information technology are prominent examples, and there are others I haven't mentioned here. It's a pity that some of this literature is inbred and self-referential.

There continues to be a growing multiplicity of terms for action-research-like processes. It's unclear if the growing sense of community amongst action researchers will counter this. I expect journals such as *Action Research*, *Concepts and Transformation* and *Systemic Practice and Action Research* will help. See also Chandler and Torbert (2003).

You will have noticed that many of the works reviewed give attention to participation and involvement. My impression is that more of this is detailed and practical than I recall from the past. I also note a welcome recent emphasis on quality and rigour, perhaps in reaction to the sloppy research labelled action research in the past.

I'm surprised that there isn't more written on how action researchers develop theory. I know of several action research PhD candidates who used grounded theory for their theory development, and there have been serious proposals to combine action research and grounded theory (Baskerville & Pries-Heje, 1999; Simmons & Gregory, 2003; Wastell, 2001). I think there are more efficient ways than this, as I've argued elsewhere (Dick, 2002).

Initially I planned to include a section on complexity theory and action research. I found surprisingly little outside the systems literature. Perhaps this too is something for the future. With so many disciplines discovering and using action research and with the more extensive communication provided by the web, many new developments can be expected.

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