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Action Research 2006 4: 97

DOI: 10.1177/1476750306060546

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ARTICLE

An ethical theory of action research pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

The theory of action research (AR) pedagogy presented in this article is, at its core, ethical in nature. For teaching, learning, and evaluating AR, the theory's goal is to increase individuals' capacity to act on their own behalf and preventing themselves from becoming an authoritarian expert. Achieving such an increased individual capacity requires the integration and deployment of multiple dimensions of ethical principles and understanding their implications for the ethics of AR pedagogy. An integration of Ibn Miskawayh's Islamic philosophy of ethical pedagogy, Iris Young's theory of justice, Greenwood and Levin's criteria for ethical participation, and my own model of participatory action research evaluation that is central to the learning process constitutes the basis of this ethical theory of AR pedagogy.

KEY WORDS

- action-reflection-action
- affective, cognitive and social change
- AR evaluation model
- ethical participation
- Islamic philosophy
- self-conscious pedagogy

Introduction

When action researchers become educators, they too often fall short. By moving abruptly from practice into elaborating action research (AR) principles, they fail to develop a substantive educational framework built on AR pedagogy, AR evaluation models, and a moral compass for guiding the process. At issue is not merely whether the collaborators learn an AR principle's meaning, but the extent to which they are able to access and understand the principles in context, as a functional part of an AR process. Without more formalized understandings and a self-conscious pedagogy, collaborators are left to rely on their intuitiveness, leading learners to determine the authenticity of a principle vis-à-vis the variations in its interpretation and social application and much of this occurs out of awareness. An integrative theory of AR pedagogy offers an opportunity to contextualize AR principles, reposition teachers, learners, and evaluators in a more explicit partnership, and challenge the dichotomous relationship between rhetoric and action found in the conventional pedagogy of the social sciences.

The integrative theory of AR pedagogy presented in this article, is, at its core, ethical in nature. For teaching, learning, and evaluating AR, the theory's goal is to increase individuals' capacity to act on their own behalf (Young, 1990) with the capability of holding back their own interest for the collective benefit when necessary (in effect, preventing them from becoming an authoritarian expert). Achieving such an increased individual capacity requires the integration and deployment of multiple dimensions of ethical principles and understanding their implications for the ethics of AR pedagogy. An integration of Ibn Miskawayh's (932–1030) Islamic philosophy of ethical pedagogy (1961), Iris Young's theory of justice (2003), Greenwood and Levin's (1998) criteria for ethical participation, and my own model of participatory action research evaluation that is central to the learning process (Barazangi, Greenwood, Burns & Finnie, 2004), constitutes the basis for this ethical theory of AR pedagogy.

Two principal objectives underlie the AR integrative theory and offer the first step toward an ethical AR pedagogy and these are graphically represented in Figure 1.

The first objective is to realize the complex interaction among private (individual) and public (social) discourse in social and educational programs (this is represented in the interaction within and among the three ovals in Figure 1). In other words, we should recognize that it is not possible to teach and learn this subject by merely gathering and using scattered techniques and models. The second objective is for collaborators to recognize that investigating each other's views of reality is the first step toward cognitive, affective, and social egalitarianism (this is represented in the spiral dynamic exchange, action, and reflection in time among individuals in Figure 1). While one may adopt principles from different disciplines, without their ethical integration, they lose their potency and

remain merely isolated tools that may or may not foster the acquisition of competence in AR.

I suggest that with these ethically integrated principles, we might redirect some of these shortcomings into positive changes as follows:

- 1 By integrating the world of ideals of social justice and information about the world, we may be able to moderate the splitting between rhetoric and action prevalent in the way social sciences are being taught. We may also be able to analyse and explain better the issues we often experience in AR teaching and evaluating situations.
- 2 By balancing fairly among different elements (cognitive, affective, social, and contextual) in the interaction between students, teachers, and evaluators, we may also help balance potential conflicts between the different principles of ethical AR as perceived by the collaborators.
- 3 By freeing human interaction from the highly individualistic constraints of prior academic, social, and cultural experiences, we may be able to help ourselves and our peers make sense of AR according to our own capacity, as well as collectively forming a participatory learning community. (This is represented in the square and the small triangle as systemizing the self-evaluation process of the learning community projects in Figure 1.)

The quality of AR pedagogy might be articulated by the ability of each participant to increase the capacity of every other to act, each on his/her own behalf, and to self-learn from their own experience, whether within their own discipline and context, or through establishing a process of co-learning for interdisciplinary and intercultural interaction.

The integrative theory of AR pedagogy presented in the following pages, evolved from a three-year immersion (2001–2004) in AR teaching and learning at Cornell University. During this period, I interacted in several different AR courses and projects acting as participant, evaluator, co-teacher, and co-learner. My interactions included direct observation; one-on-one interviews; written reflection dialogues; and face-to-face and online exchanges between students, faculty, and staff. These interactions formed the basis for analysing the multiple levels of engagements at different levels of expertise in AR, and finally, for synthesizing and systemizing the self-evaluation process I set out here. These interactions were also influenced by my own worldview of Islamic gender justice, ethical philosophy, and equilibrated self-learning.¹

The framework: action-reflection-action

A major problem in teaching social sciences is the lack of integration between the ideals social justice students learn about in the classroom and the real world

experience and information these same students directly encounter in community service. The same splitting into rhetoric and action happens in AR teaching situations when we experience difficulties in gaining a sense of authenticity, including variation in the primacy of the learner's awareness (intentionality) and her ability to understand her own cognitive transformation (theorizing) in relation to learning AR principles in that setting. The agency of the learner in her direct access to these principles vis-à-vis their rules of application is another feature of pedagogical authenticity.²

Also at stake is what and how much other related knowledge one may, or can, include, and how to integrate it with the learners' needs and interests as well as with their cultural contexts. Since the goal is to achieve an equilibrium between the individual – with the ability to increase the capacity to act on one's own behalf – and the collaborating community's needs, all without being overly self-conscious, the challenge becomes how to not diminish, as the liberal tradition did (perhaps unintentionally), the ability and desire of the learner to deal with his or her own problems in the context of group processes (Daloz, 1988).

Tensions resulting from the challenges described above have deeply influenced how social scientists react and respond to the knowledge of others, a very sensitive issue but essential to analysing and accounting for the question of power relations between researchers and the 'researched', teachers and students, evaluators and the 'evaluated'. Academics are reluctant to design curricula outside their disciplinary boundaries. They carefully avoid integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies or synthesizing conventional social science research with unconventional and participatory action research approaches.³ Finally, as students are quite sensitive to these reluctances, they can experience this kind of teaching as the imposition of a mentor's lockstep expectations and this is experienced as reluctance to give learners latitude for self-learning (Barazangi, 2004b).

While social science educators at Cornell are confronting these same challenges, there are two Cornell AR courses that provide a context in which to engage, consider, and discover AR pedagogy. These two courses are offered by Professor Davydd Greenwood, an internationally renowned AR expert, reflective practitioner, and anthropologist, and they attract undergraduate and graduate students from a wide diversity of disciplines throughout the university. My own observations have shown that the ethical standards by which Greenwood conducts his AR courses are different from the conventional ethical standards of academic teaching and conduct. Greenwood's are standards in action, meaning that his teaching is like conducting action research. He tries to increase learners' (stakeholders') capacity to act on their own behalf, for example, being consistent in teaching practice with his definition of AR (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

I began voluntarily observing in Professor Greenwood's classes in August 2001. From the beginning, my focus was to observe the learning process, not the teaching. The Cornell Undergraduate Action Research Practicum (CUARP, or

Anthropology 495) was different from conventional social sciences courses because it used a network model to provide autonomy. Each year of its three-year existence, CUARP linked a group of undergraduates interested in integrating action research based service learning with an organized network (Advisory Board) of faculty and extension staff, with expertise in action research practices. The network of faculty and extension fostered an initial AR community dialogue, helped students prepare proposals and selected the participating class of eight to 10 fellows. The selected student fellows were, on the whole, those who had community partners in place and a plan for more than a single year of activity. An informal conversation between a Cornell University alumnus/benefactor and Greenwood regarding ways to enhance the quality of undergraduate education resulted in a proposal offering undergraduates the opportunity to pursue independent research on issues of critical importance to the Ithaca community, Tompkins County, and communities in the State of New York and neighboring Canada using AR methods. The program was designed as a three-year demonstration project managed by a volunteer faculty team led by Greenwood, and was funded through a gift from Henry E. and Nancy Horton Bartels to Cornell Public Service Center (PSC) that provided critical administrative project support. Typical community projects included finding sustainable and fair solutions to issues such as North American Indian women's health; campus hazing; stereotyping; homelessness; youth conflicts and empowerment; incarceration; migrant farm workers; and a community development project that had been structured to reinforce a passive learning/teaching/research approach. Throughout the year-long fellowship, students undertook field-based AR research, met with faculty network mentors, and participated in a bi-weekly, four-credit seminar. The seminar, like the students, was interdisciplinary, inter-college, and voluntarily facilitated by the faculty team. Students discussed some critical incidents, reading material on AR philosophy, methods, and case studies, and developed action plans for the next step. At the end of each semester fellows submitted a written report of their activities, reflections, and lessons learned to the faculty network.

In CUARP, I voluntarily attended every fall semester bi-weekly seminar over a three-year period. I also responded to student's bi-weekly journals and critical incident reports posted on the class listserv, designed and assigned evaluation questionnaires, and conducted focus group interviews. One-on-one and small group meetings were held with students with whom I worked in planning and implementing their self-evaluation process. Other meetings were held to discuss matters related to their individual projects. The fall seminars were followed by spring semesters during which I conducted individual non-formal interviews with students who volunteered for in-depth follow-up and with their respective faculty/staff mentors and community partners.

The process of questioning and theorizing how ethical dimensions were guiding conversations that arose in CUARP led me to get involved in observing

Greenwood's graduate level Anthropology 663 course. One visiting scholar in Latin American Studies and seven graduate students were enrolled in this course. Three students were enrolled in the International Development Professional Masters Program, two students were enrolled in the Adult and Extension Education Doctoral Program, one student was enrolled in the City and Regional Planning Program, and one student was enrolled in the Performing Arts Masters Program. With the exception of five sessions, I voluntarily attended every weekly seminar during the Spring 2004 semester. I responded to students' weekly journals posted on the class listserv, wrote up my own reflections, and designed and conducted practitioners' reflection sessions. One-on-one meetings were held with students with whom I worked on planning and implementing these reflection sessions. I also conducted individual non-formal interviews with five students who volunteered for in-depth follow-up. My role in this course changed from an evaluator to a participant observer and from focusing on student learning to focusing on the interaction between learning and teaching, including learning and teaching for myself.

It was from my position as an inside participant over a three-year period that I was able to deeply question and comprehend pedagogical and ethical questions related to AR pedagogy. While my initial goal of participating in these two classes was to receive mentoring in AR pedagogy, my goals transformed as I grew into the AR setting and context and began to act as part of an integrated student and faculty AR community. The classroom where pedagogy is practiced became the place of direct AR experience and encounter. It set the stage for conversation and dialogue to occur and created a framework of reciprocity between action-reflection-action that could be studied and evaluated. Concrete incidents and interactions in the class illustrated the unfolding process in action and brought the theory forth. (These dynamics are represented within each of the student, teacher, and evaluator ovals in Figure 1 and in the spiral exchange of roles.)

A temporal and evolving process was crucial to shaping and transforming my role in the two AR classes. In the CUARP course, I began in Fall 2001 as an outside observer. From this more distanced and detached stance, I recorded and shared my observations about the action research learning process with class participants periodically, every four to five weeks, and at the end of the semester. These observations provided the basic data for creating a self-evaluation discourse (Barazangi et al., 2004).

The self-evaluation discourse helped transform the students into a learning community and involved them in evaluating their own learning, the course's design, their services, and the involvement of their community partners in the research process. After several reflective cycles with the learning community, I found my role had again transformed. I had moved away from my role as an external evaluator and toward a role as a participant in the pedagogical process

(insider) happening in the classroom, though my evaluation functions and interest remained clear. As my position visibly changed, the theory also evolved.

Like CUARP, my experiences in Greenwood's Anthropology 663 dramatically changed my stance as I began to experience, first-hand, the intertwining of learning, teaching, and evaluation. It was there that I began a shift toward trying to understand the nature of reflective practice and the ethics of AR pedagogy. A critical incident that triggered my transformation was a stimulating session I co-facilitated early in the semester with a graduate student on the course. We brainstormed with class members to draw out the significant meanings of Donald Schön's concept of the 'reflective practitioner'. From this, 17 characteristics, ranging from 'taking risks' to 'engaging in the real world', were chosen. At the semester's end, I observed that none of these 17 characteristics resurfaced during the class's self-evaluation session. Since these were initially considered important criteria, I wondered if this discrepancy would be considered a contradiction. Was the class not truthful to its interest? Were the members actually attaining proficiency in AR? Or, were the class dynamics, project demands, and course responsibilities evolving diverse interests and issues that took precedence over reflecting and perfecting the role of reflective practitioner? I thought that the self-evaluation narratives might address this apparent contradiction.

In both CUARP and Anthropology 663, ethical issues were encountered, particularly when we began to take responsibility for our role as collaborators embracing AR principles and practices. Initially we were guided by criteria built on spiral levels of expertise and following a conventional model of curricular development, including reflecting on new concepts as they are experienced in practice, and gradually increasing the complex interrelationships among them (Barazangi, 1988). But the group rejected the spiral level method and model in favor of a process of mutual coaching and teambuilding that cultivated learning together. At this point, I personally began analysing the multiple dimensions of ethics implicit in the type of procedural knowledge (praxis) that is not based on detached formal obligation, but rather on the ethical choice of each participant to inform the others out of a sense of social solidarity equilibrated with autonomous morality (Barazangi, 2004a).

I also began concerning myself with how to support the students' collective ability to help each other effectively and ethically participate and theorize about AR and their role in providing cognitive and moral authentication of their specific case studies. Through this process, it became increasingly apparent that the quality of AR pedagogy might be better understood as the ability of each participant to increase the capacity of every other to act, each on his/her own behalf. Ethical AR pedagogy, unlike the moral individualism typical of so many discourses, would instead be concerned with developing a free will process that integrates a conscious mind while participating in a collective AR ethics of multiple dimensions, as shown in Figure 1.

My experiences in CUARP and Anthropology 663 were further clarified when I read a reflection paper prepared by students in one of Greenwood's first AR classes, Anthropology 620, taught in 1991 (Elvemo et al., 1997). I realized then the similarity between my designated role as CUARP evaluator and Greenwood's as Anthropology 620 instructor. In the academic setting, Greenwood was being challenged to learn the design implications of pedagogical standards for AR while I was being challenged to learn the design implications of AR evaluation. By stepping aside from our roles as 'expert professor' and 'expert evaluator', we were stepping into our roles as participating learners in a reflective community.

What was happening in CUARP and Anthropology 663 was that the researcher/teacher, the researched/student, and the curricular developer/evaluator were becoming co-learners, together conceiving and critically revising a local AR pedagogical theory that would also reshape institutional educational discourse and the social relations with the community. As Elden and Levin (1991) articulate, our co-learning process generated results that were fed back and integrated into our systemized evaluation model. This process was central to improving our own 'theory'. These implicit and unpredicted outcomes provided clarifying concepts and dramatically influenced and improved the evolving ethical theory of AR pedagogy. In effect, the AR pedagogy process was visibly at work resisting conventional social science practices that seek to separate theory and practice, teaching and learning, research and analysis, and evaluation and self-reflection.

The premise of ethical conduct and theory

Testing a theory's validity requires examining what it predicts against the observed patterns in the phenomena of perceptual, attitudinal, and social change. Action researchers, as educators, often neglect to focus on how individuals are translating case study materials into AR principles and practices. Because learners generally rely on secondary information drawn from case studies and their contexts, they lose the opportunity to engage in primary knowledge and meaning-making and the new approaches and contexts that accompany these processes.

The context of engagement is where tensions and contradictions in principles and values are encountered. For this reason, I focus on the complexity that arises when ethical principles come into conflict in particular situations. Ethical behavior is not merely applying principles but rather, it involves an affective, cognitive, and social process of balancing many different elements. Sensing ethical paradox may also result in feeling constrained by the culture of the western academic context (Barazangi, 2004a). At issue is not just the participants' need to develop 'the capacity to act on their own behalf', but also their need to become free of the highly individualistic constraints of the predominant academic, social, and cultural context that has been shaping their experiences. This context acts as

a major cause of resistance influencing their ability to make sense of AR and making it difficult for them to develop ethical capacities and collectively form participatory learning communities.

My experience in the courses described above represents a fundamental shift away from what AR teachers do to engage students and toward how and why the engagements happen. Furthermore, a central concern is how engagement relates to teachers' and students' experiences and actions inside and out of the learning community in a given AR class.

In order to engage with collaborators and probe the how's and why's of engagement, the first step is to give voice to ethical paradoxes. Such a process begins by acknowledging and integrating four levels of engagement within the hierarchical western culture of Cornell's academic setting. These engagement levels, elaborated upon below, are framed and represented as 'discoveries' encountered through my position as a co-learner in CUARP and Anthropology 663. They include:

Level One: Acknowledging self-paradoxes or conscientious living;

Level Two: Negotiating community and self-development;

Level Three: Creating affective and cognitive tensions; and

Level Four: Multiple roles and value growth.

First level of engagement: acknowledging self-paradoxes or conscientious living

To self-acquire a persona that acts gracefully, not dogmatically or self-consciously, to induce an educational discourse beneficial to all (Ibn Miskawayh, 1961), requires living the paradox of the 'liberated' Muslim woman from within her own worldview. A Muslim woman is often expected to surrender her Islamic autonomous identity and worldview if she is to take on self-generated active agency to change her social structure. The price is that she becomes an outsider or 'other' in her own culture. Derived from and often legitimized by reference to this character is the power of 'irreligious' authority reserved for Muslim males and its counterpart, a remarkably similar claim of institutional 'secularity and objectivity' found in so many western academic practices, particularly within the positivist traditions. My intention was, and always is, to attain equilibrium between my individual autonomy and collective social justice. Therefore, I was always conscious of the fact that without integrating my scholarship-activism as a Muslim woman with being a reflective AR practitioner, I would not have been able to experience the integrative ethical pedagogy that I am theorizing here.

As Greenwood suggests, the academic setting is often impersonal, and routinely hierarchical and bureaucratic (Elvemo et al., 1997). What such an assertion suggests is that there is a need to find ways to foster equilibrium between the principles in practice and the views on justice, ethics, and pedagogy

that participating collaborators (students, faculty, staff, and evaluator) hold. To truly begin answering the research question: ‘Who benefits from studying the ethics of AR pedagogy?’ one needs to understand the backgrounds, personal issues, and levels of engagement of each group of participants and seek equilibrium among the paradoxes and opportunities that their differences create.

Second level of engagement: negotiating community and self-development

A learning community is one where both the individual and collective group learn together democratically. But being a feminist and an action researcher in the context of a learning community also means living a second paradox, ‘educating for autonomy’ (Morgan, 1993, p. 396). Morgan frames the paradox this way: ‘feminist education both encourages and undermines autonomy through the practice of feminist pedagogy’ (p. 396). Thus, the challenge becomes how to encourage autonomy and argue against the traditional structural injustice (Young, 2003) while developing a participatory learning community within the same structure and educational tradition. Young argues that:

we should not think of social structures as entities independent of social actors, lying passively around them easing or inhibiting their movement . . . social structures exist only in the action and interaction of persons; they exist not as states, but as processes. (2003, p. 5)

In other words, how can community and self-development be encouraged simultaneously? A documented dialogue between Professor Greenwood and two students concerning the paradox of power and gender, form and content, highlights the paradox.

Davydd: It felt senseless to me to discuss and advocate participation without modeling it to some degree in the classroom. I doubt that it is possible for anyone to learn about participatory process in a meaningful way without engaging in participatory process themselves. I also doubt that it is possible to talk about participatory action research without creating a PAR group, even on a small scale. (Elvemo et al., 1997, p. 6)

In response, Aleeza, an anthropology major and the class’s sole undergraduate, and Lisa, a graduate student who, despite her undergraduate history background, had no experience in social science research methods, reflected outside the classroom at the semester’s end:⁴

It is the unique gift of PAR that issues of practice, which are so often merely exercises in intellectual curiosity, such as defining democracy, establishing the exercises of power, and the process of creating a community of inquiry, are the heart and soul of the PAR process Implementing this belief turned out to be trickier than we imagined. We discovered that a truly democratic process couldn’t proceed without some consideration of the variables that affect participation. In Anthropology 620,

gender was such a variable, though by no means the only one. (Elvemo et al., 1997, pp. 6–7)

What Aleeza and Lisa's conversation suggests is that they were equating AR and its democratic process with equalizing everything, including gender. So, Davydd's response that true democracy or true AR does not mean equalization struck Lisa particularly as contradictory and left her feeling that

if people don't come away from the class with some inkling of what issues were important for others then it means that they are not aware of what is going on or the experiences of other people in the group, and therefore it invalidates the process in some way. (Elvemo et al., 1997, p. 8)

The ethical contradiction here might have risen from the missing awareness of a particular factor in the AR process, such as 'juggling between several identities that are tied to social and political power' (Hart, 2000, p. 165). More importantly, there is the question of what meanings are generated by the different factors. These meanings, being generated by the participating individuals based on their own situation and philosophical assumptions, carry the ethical dilemma to the level of the principles. In Aleeza's and Lisa's view:

[A] discussion of the Anthropology 620 experience would not be complete without a discussion of power and gender . . . [this article] is our attempt to explain why a diverse group of women felt so estranged from the PAR process which the seminar participants were ostensibly modeling . . . We would like to emphasize that these are our perceptions, and do not represent the views of the women of Anthropology 620 as a whole . . . [Our conversation raises] some new questions about participation, power, and PAR. (Elvemo et al., 1997, pp. 6–7).

Apparently, not realizing that a principle and its particular applications need not be synonymous (Elden and Levin, 1991), Aleeza and Lisa were conflating the principle with its application, particularly when teacher–learner power relations still dominate in the societal structure of the academy, and despite the intention of the instructor to deflate these relations by 'acknowledging these multiple identities and making it possible to hear and learn from voices that speak different languages that emanate from . . . different locations on the topography of power' (Hart, 2000, p. 165). This is evidenced in the other ethical contradiction, drawn from the conversation of Aleeza and Lisa, namely the difficulty in breaking away from the old model, be it the traditional gender relations or the learning model, as Ann stated: 'we fell into the traditional academic paradigm' (Elvemo et al., 1997, p. 9). Also, Lisa added:

Breaking away from that is difficult because we're safe with it . . . The other thing is that most of us only have experience in learning this way, so when we are given the option to choose, we only have one model to choose from. And even if we do want something different, the setting is so compelling. How could we learn about and do PAR in a class that we were being graded on? (p. 10)

Third level of engagement: creating affective and cognitive tensions

To develop the space for collaborators to collectively ‘control our destinies and improve our capacities to do so’ (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 6), means, for me, to temporarily attain and maintain the level of authority granted me as an ‘expert’ in the subject matters of Islamic philosophy and ethics; cognitive, attitudinal, and social change; and curriculum development and evaluation. Here, the next paradox becomes that of translating ‘maternal’ concern into a kind of ‘paternalistic’ intervention, as Morgan suggests. In the name of ‘knowing what’s best’, students are ‘made to write journals for a while before they understand their importance’ (Davis, 1983, quoted in Morgan, 1993, p. 399). The implication of this approach, in addition to the fact that students ‘do not see right away the importance of such methods’, is that egalitarian affective and cognitive developments are essential for sustainable social change. The initially unjustified authority is favored in the interest of creating community and greater personal development. By creating affective and cognitive tension I aimed to help learners gain awareness of their learning patterns and positivistic attitude to social research, so that they might begin transforming their perception and work into an AR approach.

Earlier findings suggested that CUARP learners were much weaker in their knowledge of social research (Barazangi et al., 2004) than the graduate students in Anthropology 620 and 663. Still, I was concerned with how each different group of learners was seeing the relationship between declarative principles and the procedural knowledge of translating principles into practice. How were they distinguishing the how’s and why’s of AR pedagogy?

The following synthesis dialogue is drawn from my observations and the self-evaluations of CUARP learners during fall 2004. The 2003–2004 CUARP fellows were expected to be at ease with AR since they were participating in the program in its third year, after it had evolved in response to the collaborative evaluation process I had shepherded over the two previous years. In addition, the 2004 fellows had the benefit of a two-day orientation at the beginning of their fellowship period and were, it seemed, much sooner able to begin functioning together as a learning community. So it was surprising to read, during the end of the semester self-evaluation session, the following sentiments from the fellows:

Lessons for the Future:

- Require an action research class prior to receiving the fellowship and/or starting the project. Three semesters would be ideal, the first intensely learning AR followed by two semesters of applying it to a project.
- First semester the models/stories in our readings didn’t seem to fit my project, but an independent study with Davydd and the AR speakers second semester developed my understanding.

This narrative represents a limited level of engagement and seems to justify Flyvbjerg's observation concerning the situation in which an 'individual experiences a given problem and a given situation in a given task area for the first time. At the novice level, facts, characteristics, and rules are not dependent in context: they are context independent' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 11). They also portray the uneven development of individuals and the impact of academic 'groupthink' influencing their actions. Variation in the adjustment of each participant to these encounters also indicates different levels of ethical dilemma.

Fourth level of engagement: multiple roles and value growth

To actively assume one's predetermined roles, be they 'expert, legitimate, maternal/referent', threatens to eliminate the possibility of educational democracy in the feminist and AR classroom. As Morgan (1993) adds, abandoning one's roles is confronting and personally challenging; 'If I dispense with these in the name of preserving democracy, I suffer personal alienation, fail to function as a role model, and abandon the politically significant role of [Muslim] woman authority' (p. 400). The fourth level of engagement moves the discussion to the ontological level of conceptualization by distinguishing the different meaning(s) of justice and their implications for analysing these paradoxes. Two concepts from Young's *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990) surface: Treatment of method and epistemology, and the ideal of community.

Firstly, 'treating methodological and epistemological issues that arise in the course of action as interruptions of the substantive normative and social issues at hand' (Young, 1990, p. 8) is problematic. Both learners and teacher in Anthropology 663 valued and were attentive to the intertwined and reciprocal movement between critiquing a theory or a methodology and remaining alert to the social issues and the people addressing them. From the way they interacted, it seemed apparent that they were acting at the level of 'competent performer', seeming to 'learn from themselves and from others to apply a hierarchical, prioritizing procedure for decision-making' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 12). Florencia, a course participant and visiting scholar from Argentina, explained this engagement during an informal interview convened to discuss her reflections and project proposal:

Nimat: Why do you think that the discussion above [the analysis on Schön's (1983) text and our discussion on crisis in professionals and crises in sciences] is challenging? Is it because of the nature of the crisis, or is it because the lack of discussion of the ethical dimension of social sciences?

Florencia: [In] *Making social science matter*, I agree with Flyvbjerg that social sciences cannot be scientific in the same sense as natural sciences are. His analysis of the four arguments (pre-paradigmatic, hermeneutic-phenomenological, Foucault's historical contingency, and, specifically, Dreyfus' tacit skills and Bourdieu's context

argument) resulting in the impossibility of social science theory and epistemology is clear and well articulated. As he anticipates, the hope for social science rests in its reorientation as 'phronetic social science'. But if the role of social science is to 'enlighten' society, and this enlighten[ment] is not framed in 'science theories' but in human values, my fear about relativism is still open. If we cannot elude subjectivism, how would we decide which values we have to reinforce? Power, democracy and participation are the keys, how can we promote them? Flyvbjerg is clear in presenting critical issues as the importance of focusing on values, context, and power relations, dialoguing with polyphony of voices (participation), and so on. However, although it is true that Flyvbjerg announced the lack of guidelines and the necessity of their elaboration, it looks like he did not make the same effort developing the know how of the 'phronetic social science' as he did with its phronesis.

At the foreground of this dialogue is Florencia's fear about the practicability of Flyvbjerg's theory and the value's dilemma (how would we decide which values we have to address?). She emphasizes the importance of his talking about the changes social scientists had to make in order to help people to discover values and guide theory and reflection to reach a higher ground, not just like natural sciences' building of theories, but at the same time, she was facing the dilemma of the application of such rhetoric in real life situations.

Secondly, 'the ideal of community also suppresses difference among subjects and groups [within the community]' (Young, 1990, p. 12). Hence, as a collaborating learning community, both students and teacher in Anthropology 663 were adamant about, and sensitive to, (1) expertise and experience, and (2) the fact that insisting on the ideal of participation may result in oppressing the non-participant or the silent participant members.

The issue of the expert is best described by Davydd's comments on the class self-evaluation:

The role of expertise and the use of my experience is another issue that comes up in all action research courses. A collaborative learning community must forge a series of agreements and take responsibility for important parts of the group process The other responsibility is to model the kind of behavior that is central to AR facilitation and to bring up issues relevant to AR. (Email communication)

The class had already confirmed/validated Davydd's comments by stating in the self-evaluation:

The mere presence of Davydd even if he's not talking you know he's the expert of the field, gives you a comforting feeling, even as you're babbling about your concerns.

I felt that from everybody so I can't separate the role of Davydd from each of us individually.

Could and should we consider one of the ethical criteria to be that we, as 'experts', play a less ideological role of the expert and assume a non-practical experience? If such a criteria encompasses, as Greenwood states in his class self-

evaluation, ‘the commitment to make a contribution and the ability to listen, to model AR and to bring up issues relevant to AR, and to forge a series of agreements and take responsibility for important parts of the group process’, then what would be the balanced outcome of all these strategies? And who is to judge that? The following may provide some answers:

Florencia: How can [did] Schön become the man who can explain reflection-in-action? How can we become such a superhero (a good reflection-in-action practitioner)?

Nimat: Is this the ideal of an AR expert?

Florencia: It is a goal. [There are] different levels of expertise. This highest level is when an action takes place in an intuitive way, but even then, one needs to reflect on it. It is unconscious incorporation of knowledge (intuitive understanding) in the loop of reflection-action-reflection. Although during action, one cannot reflect, but works intuitively.

It seems that Florencia resolved her ethical dilemma by realizing the multiple dimensions of the reflexive practice – reflection-action-reflection.

The issue of participation was also discussed repeatedly, but the more specific representation of it came in the reflections of Larisa (a teacher and a community developer from Bosnia Herzegovina) as follows:

Larisa: Participation in the context of the groups whose goal is to contribute to healing and war-induced trauma recovery; It was so important never to push them [Bosnian youth and adults, to] express their stories or force them to participate because they were so vulnerable that any coercive step on our side (even with the best intentions) could have been disastrous for their self-esteem and self-confidence, already severely damaged and affected by the war.

Nimat, responding to Larisa’s earlier reflection on learning about AR and about the importance of participation: Questions about AR came [to you] after you were able to self-examine, and tell the story of the organization with which you worked, then [became] the genesis of your project!

Larisa confirmed: After telling the story, I felt the space [was provided for me].

Conclusion: AR evaluation and the ethical theory

To balance these paradoxes, I focused my conversations on the co-learners’ perspective on AR pedagogy and engaged them in self-evaluation as central to the learning process. Subsequently, self-evaluation was systematized through journal writing and reflection into an AR evaluation model. That is, learners not only balanced the tensions/conflicts of their individual needs with those of the community and changed their perspective on ‘instructor/teacher-student/learner-

evaluator/observer' relations, but also on the meaning of social research, on academia-community relations, and on who defines community social issues and social justice. This does not solve all problems, however, because this set of changes is still located in the classroom. Optimal ethical standards in AR may not be achieved until the local community itself also evolves into a learning community on its own terms, and, consequently, the collaborating academic institution starts seeing itself as one of the learning stakeholders instead of the 'expert authority and powerful' partner.

My goal in balancing these tensions and conflicts is to purposely change relations in knowledge-generation by attempting to integrate my collaborators' ethical principles, while working with them in order that they may also become aware of their prior views of the discipline(s) and of interdisciplinary and intercultural boundaries while managing their individual and collective actions. I do not assume the level of the perfect 'expert', but the level at which the expert does not stop learning, or as the 'proficient performer' who has 'evolved [her] perspective on the basis of prior actions and experiences' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 16). A key goal of the AR evaluation project was to find ways in which participatory dynamics may aid in formulating and implementing the new view for the self-learning and self-evaluation discourse.

The intent was to generate pedagogical guidelines for a policy-oriented scholarship by shifting the individual practice of AR into a community-based learning practice. Also, because the principles of AR evolved directly from practices within the different case contexts, and eventually, the practices became the norm for theorizing about the reflexive practitioner, action researchers still lack a developed theory of AR pedagogy, of AR evaluation models, and of guidelines of ethical conduct for the learning community. Such theories, models, and guidelines are essential to ensuring learners' cognitive and affective change, and to reaching the desired result of substantive and sustainable social change.

The evaluation was centered on the students' participation in the reflective analysis of their self-generated data in order to learn about AR by actually using its tools, to analyse their own learning process, and to understand how their previously acquired learning behaviors are, to a certain extent, standing in the way of their being able to help their community partners solve issues of joint interest. Consequently, the evaluation became central to the pedagogical process as faculty and staff began a systemized collective reflection on their own practices. In other words, as collaborators, we analysed how best to realize AR in a participatory learning environment that is based in a participatory community development.

Although epistemologically sound, according to the participants, because it entails consistent self-equilibrated reflection-action-reflection, it does not need to be theoretically grounded, as Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) suggest, nor is it a set of external standards to regulate the ethics or the pedagogy. The theory

relies on viewing participatory evaluation as a collaborative process through which all new learners, teacher/learner, and evaluator/learner act out their own inquiries to achieve graceful actions that are beneficial to all. This theoretical framework is self-acquired if systematically pursued in a properly structured learning community. Instead of being obsessed with communicating what Schön calls ‘an epistemology of practice based on reflection-in-action’ (1987, quoted in Usher et al., 1997, p. 146), it is concerned with how its discourse helps each participant act and reflect on their own behalf, while keeping the needs and interests of community members in mind. By being aware of, and truthful to, one’s assumptions, definitions, and position, the framework remains flexible, yet reliable, and relevant, yet valid for others who may use it with cultural awareness.

The theory is also intended to change the perception of prior paradigms by realizing learners’ agency in direct access to suitable principles for collective inquiry in action. The theory further argues that ethical behavior is not the simple application of principles, but a social process of trying to achieve a balance among many different elements. Rather than being co-opted by existing paradigms and instead of defending the duality of theory-practice, reflective-reflexive, etc. the theory changes the naming of elements and characteristics of the process.

Notes

- 1 This article, therefore, describes my collaboration with students, faculty, and staff in two Cornell AR courses, particularly with Professor Davydd Greenwood, the lead teacher, mentor, and collaborating editor. I am also indebted to Judy Healey for editing the manuscript, and to Carrie Brindisi for her computer graphics skills and help in developing the ‘Multiple Dimensions of Ethical AR Pedagogy’ figure. This figure was partially an adaptation of figures from Reason (1988, pp. 224–227) and Elden and Levin (1991, p. 130). The *Action Research* special issue editors’ comments and Arthur Wilson’s suggestions were also invaluable. Paula Horrigan’s insights were instrumental in reconstructing the article in its final version.
- 2 ‘Authenticity’ here refers to the participants creating their own terms of action while generating specific meanings based on their own experience in a learning community.
- 3 I use AR and PAR in my research work in different contexts for different emphasis. The working definition of action research that I use is ‘a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis [wherein involved members may] control their destinies and improve their capacities to do so’ (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 6). The working definition for PAR that I use is a participatory process that generates authentic meaning and action to promote perceptual, attitudinal, and social change.
- 4 Elvemo et al. (1997) cite the students’ real names. I am also using the students’ real names (in Anthropology 633), with their consent.

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