

Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume: 5 No. 2, September 2016

pp. viii-xii

ersc.nmmu.ac.za

ISSN: 2221-4070

Editorial

Educational Research for Social Change And the Need for New Methodologies

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As an academic journal, ERSC promotes participatory and emancipatory paradigms and methodologies in research towards social change. Social change refers to “shifts in the attitudes and behavior that characterize a society” (Greenwood & Gunner, 2008, p. 1), which are made possible through progress in society. As such, due to technological advances, people begin to implement innovations that lead to change in how one engages—that is, modification of behaviour (Greenwood & Gunner, 2008). Based on the above, we argue that social change refers to changing our thinking and doing—which implies moving from where we are currently. In essence, this concept seems to suggest change or alternative thinking, not only about phenomena but also about how we engage with and explore phenomena: rethinking praxis as action. As Eisner (1993, p. 8) argued, there are multiple ways to make meaning of the world and so we need to adopt multiple forms of research that will help us to “search for seas that take us beyond the comforts of old ports.” The aim of this journal is thus to promote methodologies that change the way we conduct research.

Because we engage in research with “more of the same” traditional tools, we are likely to get more of the same research. We are suggesting that research can be a change process in and of itself—for both participants and researcher. We emphasise that we should rethink how we engage with our participants in a manner that it is beneficial to all and not only to the researcher; thus, research not on participants, but with and alongside participants. At the same time, it is important to engage in research that encourages transformative thinking, and which goes beyond traditional westernised canons or, in the words of Knowles (2015, p. 3), we need “African solutions for African problems.” We are thus also arguing for research that not only utilises African theoretical perspectives to interpret findings, but also utilises existing theoretical perspectives in innovative ways when we engage with our findings. It is thus high time to rethink what knowledge is, how it is constituted (see Mbembe, 2015), and whose knowledge counts. We as researchers need to look critically at our own understandings of what knowledge is and how it ought to be generated because, as Mbembe posited, history can entrap one. According to Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) habitus and Giddens’ (1984) structuration, we enact with society and engage in research based on our embedded habitus and, due to the structures embedded in our minds, without even thinking about it or questioning it. As such, what is needed is that “a new understanding of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics has to be achieved” (Mbembe, 2015, p. 26). The above then seems to imply the need for shifting the boundaries of what counts as research and which methodologies are prioritised (see also Knowles, 2015). This is easier said than done, but we believe it is time to re-imagine educational research that results in social change.

To start this re-imagination process, we offer three suggestions. First, reflection is key. What is required is reflection that includes taking action—reflexive reflection—to engage differently and, at the same time, to have reasons for why this change is necessary. Second, part of re-imagining the research process is utilising the steps of transformative learning (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 105, with reference to Mezirow), which we will use as basis to suggest how one could embark on this journey. The journey of self-reflective exploration commences by asking oneself whether one should think about changing one's methodological approach with a view to promote social change—something that Mezirow (as cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p. 105) referred to as being confronted with a “disorienting dilemma” (Do I have to change? Why? Do I want to change?). This is followed by self-examination by means of engaging in one's own reflective writing during which one makes your own assumptions evident (Making one's beliefs clear to oneself by means of reflective writing). This process then requires that one rethinks your existing thinking about methodology and shares this thinking with peers (Talking to others about your thinking). At the same time, it requires thinking about one's existing role as researcher, including thinking about one's new role as researcher—and including the role of the participants (Thinking how I am going to make the change and which different research processes and tools could be used). Thus, one has to question how one will engage in the future (How will I take it from here?). And in order to enable oneself, it is advised that one engages with literature, webinars, seminars, workshops, and so forth, that are available in order to obtain the necessary knowledge and skills (Which literature, webinars, seminars, workshops, etc., are available? Who in my institution is already engaging differently? How could they assist?). This then has to be followed by implementing one's new perspective (Engaging in research—write proposal—re-imagine roles and process—ethical clearance—conduct research—reflect continuously about the process and your experiences—think: Is it promoting social change?). In order to gain self-confidence in engaging with a new methodology, it is suggested that one engages with peers who implement the new methodology in order to ask for advice (Engage with others by working together with them in such research, ask for advice, etc.). The co-participation or individual engagement would then lead to one asking oneself whether this new way of doing research can be integrated in one's previous perspectives or perceptions regarding research, that is, has it promoted changing one's existing position? (Reflect if this could be you. Has your research promoted social change? What is your position now?). By means of reflective writing addressing and thinking about the aspects mentioned above, it appears thus that one is afforded an opportunity to transform oneself; that is, transformative learning provides an opportunity to re-think and articulate current assumptions and perceptions with a view to change existing points of reference (Mezirow, 1997).

Thirdly, it is vital to follow through with the suggestions, especially utilising the experiences of peers who have engaged, or who are engaging, with the methodology that the “novice” methodological researcher intends to embrace, because this could assist one with moving from the periphery towards the centre when joining communities of practice (Wenger, 1999). It is through asking and sharing experiences among members of a community of practice that the novice researcher, novice in the sense of being new to participatory methodologies, learns as a result of social discourse—and moves from being a novice to becoming an expert.

Our editorial and the collection of articles are offered as a way to stimulate discussion and to continue pushing the boundaries towards innovative educational research for social change. In this open edition of ERSC, most of authors have engaged with alternative research designs and methodologies—precisely what has been advocated for in this editorial. The articles offer different examples of how powerful alternative approaches to research can be in terms of learning and development of both researcher and participants.

Chris Burman in the first article entitled, “*Knowledge as Enablement: Additional Perspectives Influenced by Complexity,*” builds on the interesting and timeous work of Erasmus and Albertyn (2014),

Knowledge as Enablement: Engagement Between Higher Education and the Third Sector in South Africa. He posits that in such a partnership, outcomes that are transformative and beneficial to both community and university can be leveraged through purposefully directed knowledge. He acknowledges the complexities, and that their influence is not often understood nor taken into consideration, but argues how it can—when using action-oriented methodologies—deepen engaged scholarship. This article provides a frame for the other articles that follow.

In their article, “Collaborated Understandings of Context-Specific Psychosocial Challenges Facing South African School Learners: A Participatory Approach,” Setlhare-Meltor, Wood, and Meyer report on a community-based participatory action research project undertaken with teacher participants to facilitate a collaborative understanding of the contextual psychosocial challenges that learners face. The teachers participated in a participatory action research project to enable them to learn how to develop a support process for learners in need. The participatory research process assisted the teachers to have a deeper understanding of the psychosocial challenges facing learners, and improved their ability to begin to address these and network with community stakeholders to make such support more sustainable. Participation in the process thus increased teacher agency and competence to take control of their own situation and find ways to improve it.

Morojele and Motsa, in the third article, draw on participatory visual methodology to explore the real-life school experiences of six Grade 6 vulnerable children attending a rural primary school in Swaziland. In their article entitled, “Vulnerability and Children’s Real-Life Schooling Experiences in Swaziland,” they utilise a social constructivist perspective to frame their findings. Using a qualitative approach, they combine semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews with photovoice—a participatory visual method—to generate the data with the children. Their findings are offered as vulnerable children’s experiences in home and family spaces, and vulnerable children’s experiences in school spaces. The findings were used to leverage some insights to an understanding of how vulnerable children’s quality of schooling and educational experiences might be improved in order to promote social change and social justice.

The fourth article ventures into using poetry with children in a science class. Donald and Barker report in their article, “Science and Poetry as Allies in School Learning,” how poetry can be integrated with science through the writing of a science observation report followed by writing these observations as a poem. They point out how this could lead to productive (and creative) learning across traditional discipline boundaries and enable a cultural dimension of science within a sociocultural frame. Three areas of synergy between science and poetry are highlighted: creativity, culture, and the curriculum. Their work opens up possibilities of pedagogy informing methodology, for example, using poetic inquiry in a science class. As such, social change can be promoted by using alternative approaches for the teaching and learning of science.

Feldman, in the fifth article, “Pedagogical Habitus Engagement: Teacher Learning and Adaptation in a Professional Learning Community,” explains how participation in a professional learning community can facilitate deep reflection on practice to promote socially just teaching. She draws on Hattam, Brennan, Zipin, and Comber (2009, p. 304) to explain that

by “methodo-logic,” we thus do not mean research methods or even methodology, but rather the logic of an approach for chasing socially just change through research [and dialogue], including guiding principles that underpin decisions and activities in all points and dimensions of the project.

She frames her work in Bourdieu's notion of pedagogical habitus, and shows how continuous reflexive dialogue can enable participants to change their thinking about their practice and ultimately translate this thinking into a transformative pedagogy that will promote social change.

The sixth article, "Two Years Later: Preservice Teachers' Experiences of Learning to Use Participatory Visual Methods to Address the South African AIDS Epidemic," by MacEntee, explores whether three teachers actually implemented what they had learned as students during their professional development on using participatory visual methods for HIV and AIDS education. For her, the use of participatory visual methodologies were meant to be a catalyst for them to understand and infuse HIV and AIDS into their curriculum, however, she found that they did not implement these in their daily teaching practice as full-time teachers. MacEntee argues for ongoing support in order to sustain implementation, and posits that AIDS fatigue could influence lack of implementation, that some participatory visual methods might be more appropriate than others, and that new teachers might be hesitant to introduce alternative pedagogies because this might cause friction between mentor and apprentice. It is thus important to question the above in order to promote social change.

Turning to educators at higher education institutions, the next article "Examining Aspects of Self in the Creative Design Process: Towards Pedagogic Implications" shows how de Beer, a jewellery designer, jewellery artist, and lecturer, uses autoethnography as methodology to explore how he can engage with his understanding of his own creative design process to promote the creative development of his students. Locating his work in a transformative paradigm, he uses self-interview and multi-voicing within autoethnography, and puts forward the following findings pertaining to pedagogy as a jewellery design lecturer: creativity is not linear, the process can lead to unexpected positive results, play is important to promote creativity, and the role of personal experience should not be underplayed. While these have pedagogical implications, his autoethnographic research into his own creative design process made visible the richness of personal histories and local contexts as resources for learning and teaching about creativity and, more broadly, as resources for social change.

The eighth article, by a group of early-career academics (ECAs) Masinga, Kortjass, Myende, Chirikure, Marais, Mwel, and Singh-Pillay, engages the reader with their experiences of professional development through making use of arts-based methods (such as collage, concept-mapping, and poetic inquiry) in a collective self-study methodology. In "Hear Our Voices": A Collective Arts-Based Self-Study of Early-Career Academics on Our Learning and Growth in a Research-Intensive University," using a social constructivist lens to frame their work, they form and inform their own learning and development as ECAs to change their feelings of despair and being overwhelmed in the higher education arena, to feeling agents of their own careers.

The next article focuses on a different aspect of educational research as social change and looks at how university students can be enabled—through community engagement embedded in psychology modules—to engage meaningfully in communities. In the article entitled, "Embedding Community-Based Service-Learning into Psychology Degrees at UKZN, South Africa," Akhurst, Solomon, Mitchell, and van der Riet reflect on their experiences of implementing initiatives in a range of psychology modules to enable students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, to engage meaningfully with and in communities in order to contribute to social justice. They point to the value of such initiatives as articulated by the students, and provide further insight into the value of such work as well as to the challenges, offering some suggestions for deepening the important engagement with and in the community in order to promote social change.

The final article, "Sustainability of International Collaborative Partnerships in Education: A Personal Research Journey," by Engelbrecht, employs an analytical auto-ethnographical methodological

approach, using personal narratives and reflection that focus on collaboration pertaining to a teaching practice component in a project in Palestine. She concludes that synergy for sustainable international partnerships is influenced by cultural competence and positive interpersonal connections within which the relevant power differentials are recognised and cultural assumptions are made. As such, it is thus evident that partnership, which has collaboration in mind, has its own difficulties that one has to take cognisance of.

Our book review, written by Diko and Wessels, examines *Polyvocal Professional Learning Through Self-Study Research* edited by Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasia P. Samaras. The book focuses on the power that each individual holds, as is evident from the title of the first chapter, "The Power of 'We' for Professional Learning." The thirteen chapters provide the reader with creative methodological ideas pertaining to self-study projects.

The last section of this edition is Cherrington's thoughtful report on the 15th Qualitative Methods Conference, hosted from 3–5 May 2016, in Glasgow in the United Kingdom, and themed "Collaboration Considered: Complexities and Possibilities Across Communities and Cultures."

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