

Action Research

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Kurt Lewin (1946) introduced the term *action research* as a practical response to complex and intractable social issues. He defined it as comparative research on social action and its effects that could lead to further social action. Social research, he argued, had made noteworthy progress at discovering general laws that governed behavior such as racism and at what he called “diagnosis” (p. 37) of the specific character of situations. There was a need, however, for a complementary area of research that was engaged every step of the way with social planning and social action processes. Drawing on examples of research collaborations with civic and institutional actors seeking to improve intergroup relations, he explained that this form of social research “proceeds in a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (p. 38). Action research could demonstrate the potential for synergy between practitioners and social scientists for achieving social progress, although he recognized that it would require “training large numbers of social scientists who can handle scientific problems but are also equipped for the delicate task of building productive, hard-hitting teams with practitioners” (p. 42).

This chapter defines action research as an approach that orchestrates cyclical processes of action and research that are simultaneously contributing to addressing practical concerns related to social issues and to the goals of social science. We believe that action research is especially well suited for community-based research designed to contribute to community capacity building and democratic social change efforts. Our chapter begins with an introduction to action research in which we

provide brief examples of action research projects conducted on a variety of issues and in a variety of contexts. The next section focuses on the design and conduct of action research. In that section, we offer design principles for conducting action research in community and organizational settings. This is followed by a case study of an action research partnership with a community organizing network working on multiple issues, including mass incarceration, immigration, and transit. We conclude with a call for more transdisciplinary action research on pressing social issues.

INTRODUCTION TO ACTION RESEARCH

In introducing and developing the concept of action research, Lewin (1946) could sense that he was on to something big: “I could not help but feel that the close integration of action, training, and research holds tremendous possibilities for the field of intergroup relations. I would like to pass on this feeling to you” (p. 43). The fact that similar models for action research have emerged in many disciplines and in different parts of the world suggests that his enthusiasm was well founded. Although all of these models have themes in common—for instance, a focus on collaborative efforts to identify solutions to social problems—there is substantial variation in the relative emphases of these models.

For example, models for participatory action research that have been influential in South America (e.g., Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991) have tended to emphasize empowerment and critical consciousness of participants in the service of societal transformation and liberation of oppressed groups. Some strands of action research in North

America, such as those commonly described as community-based participatory research (e.g., Wallerstein & Duran, 2006), have tended to emphasize democratization of the research process, with a critical eye on the mutuality of relationships between community members and (typically academic) research partners. Some position participatory action research as a vehicle for elevating alternative knowledge systems: “an epistemology that values the intimate, painful and often shamed, knowledge held by those who have most endured social injustice” (Torre & Fine, 2011, p. 116). Others emphasize the utility of a different epistemology for applied research and the need for an action science to deal with the complex systems that perpetuate longstanding social problems. These strands sometimes echo Lewin in arguing for an approach to social science that is more akin to the practical problem solving that takes place in engineering than it is to the controlled experiments conducted in basic physical sciences (e.g., Livingood et al., 2011). Still others (e.g., Nyden & Wiewel, 1992) emphasize the potential impact of equipping less-resourced community-based organizations with research that can strengthen their hand in policymaking processes.

As a broad overarching concept, then, action research can be defined as an approach that “aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework” (Rapoport, 1970, p. 499). When compared with the more common philosophical grounding of social science, logical positivism, action research represents not only a difference in research setting, design, or method but also a difference in epistemology. The epistemological underpinnings of action research can be located in the Aristotelian concept of praxis, in the philosophical pragmatism exemplified by the writings of William James and John Dewey, in existentialism and phenomenology, and in critical theory (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Susman & Evered, 1978). Again, variation exists among models or strands of action research, with some applications drawing on multiple methods and epistemologies, sometimes including positivism, and others more strictly applying singular theories and methods.

It is certainly possible for action researchers and other social researchers operating in a positivist

framework to collaborate. There have often been tensions, however, between the two. This is primarily because of the differing standards for evaluating the results of research, which are linked to the deeper differences in the fundamental goals of research pursuits. Many advocates for action research (e.g., Greenwood, 2007; Hoshmand & O’Byrne, 1996) have pointed out that conducting action research can present challenges to researchers attempting to operate or build careers in institutions that assess impact and productivity according to standards for positivist social science. These challenges include a lack of understanding of the action research process and the types of outputs that it produces, as well as a lack of a supportive and collegial climate for sustaining programs of action research.

Although we readily acknowledge that it is challenging to design and conduct action research, and to sustain programs of action research in institutions where most social research is carried out in other traditions, we wish to provide an alternative perspective, especially as this type of work is particularly timely. Information on the large number of social, political, economic, and environmental justice issues facing our communities and societies can tend to inundate us. Many of us feel compelled to direct our efforts not only toward greater understanding of these phenomena but also toward action and progress. At the same time, academic disciplines and research-oriented institutions are questioning and critically examining their relevance to communities near and far. Many are examining and investing in new models for outreach and engagement, including action research. It is, therefore, an important time to demonstrate the possibilities for action research to bridge research and practice and contribute to both the current state of knowledge in the social sciences and to progress on pressing community and social issues.

There are a wide variety of topics and disciplines engaged in different forms of mixed methods action research. For example, action research is often conducted in pursuit of health equity. Within this domain, it is sometimes referred to as community-based participatory research and strives for true partnership between researchers and communities and a balance between research and action, with the goal of ending health disparities. These approaches tend to prioritize health concerns of local relevance to communities and

utilize an ecological framework that recognizes and attends to multiple determinants of health, illness, and disease. As noted earlier, such partnerships emphasize collaborative, equitable relationships and participation of all partners—community and academic—throughout all stages of the research process (Israel et al., 2008; see Chapter 25, this volume).

The specific methods utilized in action research projects in pursuit of health equity are variable and determined by the specific needs and capacities of community partners. There are numerous examples of partnerships employing mixed methods approaches. For instance, several of this chapter's authors have collaborated on a project utilizing mixed methods that emerged out of a community's desire to understand a significant and unexpected improvement in the African American infant mortality rate in Dane County, Wisconsin. Leaders in neighborhoods, local nonprofit organizations, and local government agencies posited that changes in interorganizational networks operative in the county might have impacted mothers' ability to access health services, information, social services, and other resources of importance for assuring positive birth outcomes. The community-academic partnership investigated this hypothesis using a multistage mixed methods design that began by conducting semistructured qualitative interviews of representatives of key social service, health care, and advocacy organizations. Preliminary analyses of these interview data were used to inform survey data collection, which included an interorganizational network analysis to capture specific changes at the organizational and systemic levels thought to have impacted infant mortality rates. Finally, to triangulate findings from the first two (i.e., the qualitative and quantitative) phases of data collection and analysis, focus groups were conducted with women who had experienced these organizations and systems as clients and patients (Sparks, Faust, Christens, & Hilgendorf, 2015).

Action research can also be applied in urban planning and community development efforts. As a response to the lack of community input in the urban planning and development process, residents and organizations can come together to build community-based coalitions to support and represent the interests and benefits of low-income communities of color (Baxamusa, 2008). One such community is Santa Ana, California, a city whose

population is nearly 80% Latino. Almost half of the population (47.3%) is foreign born, and 21.5% of persons live below the poverty line. A group of organizations and residents helped create the Santa Ana Collaborative for Responsible Development (SACReD) to advocate for development that meets the needs of the local community and is accountable to those who are impacted by the development. The SACReD coalition is comprised of neighborhood-based and nonprofit organizations focused on housing, economic justice, health, culture, and historic preservation.

In 2009, SACReD became aware of a plan between the city council and a developer for a housing development that would impact a historic Latino barrio and began organizing to include community benefits into this specific development (González, Sarmiento, Urzua, & Luévanos, 2012). As part of a larger political grassroots strategy, action research was led by community organizers, residents, engaged scholars, and community-based planners. This model involved using data from various community organizing strategies, including home visits, community forums, meetings, and community actions. It also included gathering and analyzing data from various sectors, such as housing, culture and the arts, open space, historic preservation, and labor. The collaborative produced several documents, including the proposed community benefits agreement, outreach materials, and alternative project proposals. SACReD built the necessary political power to bring the city council to the negotiating table and include some community benefits within the development.

Action research can also be a tool for economic and labor justice and for food systems change. From campaigns to raise federal and state minimum wage levels across all sectors, to nationwide fast-food protests, food chain workers are organizing against social and economic injustices of the dominant industrial food system (e.g., Jayaraman, 2013; Lo, 2014). Mixed methods action research is a core tool used to build this cross-sector movement across local and national scales. The Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) seeks to build solidarity among roughly 20 million food chain workers in order to improve wages and working conditions for all food systems workers. One member organization, Restaurant Opportunities Center United, has created extensive action research partnerships between workers, organizers, and

academic researchers. Another member organization, UNITE HERE, has used mixed methods action research to launch Real Food, Real Jobs (<http://www.realfoodrealjobs.org/>) campaigns in numerous K-12 schools, college campuses, and international airports. To reach broader audiences and generate public support, some of these organizations also rely on mixed methods (e.g., maps, text-based reports, videos) for disseminating research findings (e.g., Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2014).

These initiatives typically involve workers not only as future beneficiaries of specific policy and systems changes but also as key contributors to the research process. For instance, in New Haven, Connecticut, school cafeteria workers belonging to Local 217 of UNITE HERE used mixed methods action research for their successful campaign to bring more scratch cooking (i.e., preparing meals with raw and minimally processed ingredients instead of reheating premade frozen foods) and local foods to New Haven's public schools. The action research that made this possible—conducted in partnership with one of this chapter's authors—began with a series of qualitative interviews with key members of the K-12 cafeteria labor force. These preliminary data served as the basis for quantitative survey research. Local 217 organizers leveraged the survey collection process as a means for developing union leadership. Specifically, they asked core members to take ownership of the campaign by actively (and in some cases repeatedly) encouraging their coworkers to complete the questionnaire. This peer-to-peer model, which resulted in a 70% survey response rate, also provided workers with a conversational platform for envisioning and verbalizing what the “lunch ladies’ vision” of school food would be. Their vision entailed cooking healthy fresh foods of high gustatory quality (“real food”) and increasing the work hours and number of skilled positions within the school food service sector (“real jobs”).

Mixed methods data—workers’ personal stories combined with aggregate statistics from the survey questionnaires—provided a holistic picture of the importance of improving school food. The research team packaged analyses of these data into an accessible, highly visual report that cafeteria workers shared with neighbors, parents, and other community members (Gaddis & Cruz-Uribe, 2013). Local 217 built the necessary political

support to negotiate a new contract that makes significant strides in improving cafeteria workers’ ability to earn a livable wage and feel proud of the taste and nutritional quality of the meals they serve. After this win at the bargaining table, academic partners were drawn back into the action research cycle to assist Local 217 in designing new pilot programs and evaluation protocols.

DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH

The examples described earlier provide a sense of the varied social issues and policy domains that can be targeted by action researchers and their community and organizational partners. They also exemplify the breadth of disciplinary perspectives, methodologies, collaborations, and partnership structures that can be employed in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of action research projects, as well as the actions associated with the research. Clearly, design of action research must take a variety of complex issues into account. Nevertheless, in seeking to simplify and unite the field, or introduce it to others, many action researchers (e.g., Acosta & Goltz, 2014) often cite a basic cycle involving four phases: (a) assessment, (b) planning, (c) action, and (d) reflection. This cyclical notion harkens back to Lewin’s (1946) idea that action research proceeds in a “spiral of steps” (p. 38), with each step including planning, action, and evaluation of the results of actions. A spiral or helical representation of this process emphasizes that the process should build on the knowledge gained from the previous step. Although this process model can be useful for heuristic and descriptive purposes, its simplicity can mask some of the complexity and nuance involved in designing and conducting action research for maximal impact on social issues. Here, we offer several principles for designing and conducting action research in community and organizational settings that shed some light on the complexities involved.

Bridge Research and Action

The questions that animate social scientific research do not always run parallel to those that pique the curiosity of those involved in social action and community practice. Action research that is designed and conducted well, however, can contribute both to the research literature in the

social sciences and to social action through identifying commonalities and foundations on which to build bridges between the two. This requires an ability to translate not just research to practice (a translational skill that is stressed in many forms of research) but also action or practice to research. Furthermore, in addition to the ability to interpret, describe, and translate each field for the other, it requires the ability to creatively imagine ways in which the two could harness each other's strengths for improved outcomes on both sides. When action research is designed and conducted in ways that do not effectively build these bridges, it can become either (a) social action or community practice with some research or evaluation being conducted on it or its effects that is largely disconnected from theory or (b) social science research that is theoretically driven and conducted with some degree of involvement or buy-in from participants in community and organizational settings. It is important to distinguish these more lopsided versions of integration of research and action from action research that builds bridges that are firmly anchored on both the research side and the action side. One principle that we propose for action research design is, therefore, to maximize the aspects of a project that can contribute to theory in social science while also informing and influencing action in community and organizational settings.

Bridge Disciplines

Problems that communities and organizations face rarely confine themselves neatly to a single discipline. It is possible for action researchers to design research that draws upon and contributes to multiple disciplines and simultaneously provides more meaningful insights for social action or community practice. Sometimes, a single researcher can become familiar with theory, methods, and evidence from several disciplines. In many cases, however, it is advantageous for teams of researchers from different disciplines to collaborate to design and conduct research that can more holistically address the various substantive phenomena, processes, and outcomes of interest to communities and organizations. The example described earlier of mixed methods action research on declines in the African American infant mortality rate in Dane County, Wisconsin, is illustrative. A project team was formed specifically to pair the substantive and methodological expertise of a medical

anthropologist with that of a community psychologist. The resulting design for the research project incorporated insights from several disciplines to respond to the hypotheses of community partners in a way that was more fully informed in terms of theory and methodology. Such transdisciplinary collaborations have been proposed and studied as promising strategies for achieving the potential of action research (Stokols, 2006). A second proposed principle for designing and conducting action research is, therefore, to optimally match and mix the substantive and methodological strengths of researchers with the hypotheses emerging from ongoing social action.

Build Powerful Partnerships

A number of factors must be considered when establishing partnerships for designing and conducting action research. The partnerships that were described earlier, between social researchers and the SACReD collaborative and between researchers and Local 217 of UNITE HERE, provide examples of powerful partnerships in which intentional and mutually advantageous relationships have been developed between social researchers and organizations and community residents leading social action efforts. In seeking to develop such partnerships for designing and conducting action research, researchers should seek to partner with entities that can build and exercise power and who are committed to improving their practices through implementation of research findings. Action researchers, in turn, should examine hypotheses that are emerging from the partner organization or community, should use multiple methods, and should provide regular, thoughtful feedback of analyses of data that are collected. Speer and Christens (2013) highlighted these as key elements in strategic engagement in action research for impact on social issues. A third proposed principle for designing and conducting action research is, therefore, that in order to achieve maximum impact, action researchers should seek to develop partnerships with communities and organizations capable of exercising social power.

CASE STUDY

We now turn to an example of the application of action research that involves several of the authors of this chapter and WISDOM, a Wisconsin

statewide federation of congregation-based community-organizing initiatives. Across multiple projects, the WISDOM organizing network serves as a partner in making social science matter through action research. Community organizing is a field of practice in which residents collaboratively investigate and undertake sustained collective action regarding social issues of mutual concern (Christens & Speer, 2015). WISDOM empowers people throughout Wisconsin to be a part of political, social, economic, and environmental decision-making processes that impact their lives. As an interfaith, nonpartisan organization, nearly 160 congregations representing more than 19 religious traditions are members of WISDOM. Congregations engage through the federation's 11 affiliates located in regions across the state. WISDOM affiliates establish local campaigns to address economic, racial, and social disparities throughout Wisconsin. Most local organizing federations are also involved in statewide issue campaigns that mobilize broad bases of people around mass incarceration, immigration, public transportation, access to health care, and a fair economy.

WISDOM functions as a powerful strategic partner for action research because of its ability to exercise social power for the purposes of social change, as well as its clarity in mission and process toward these ends. Its affiliates come together in support of WISDOM's primary goals:

1. To build a powerful, values-based community that bridges the divides of race, class, religious denomination, geography, and partisan political affiliation.
2. To develop the leadership capacities of its members and, especially, to encourage the leadership capacity of members who belong to groups that have been marginalized by the larger society.
3. To build the capacity to be able to bring about real, effective systemic change that aligns with our shared values on the local, state, and even national levels.

To meet these goals, WISDOM members are continuously involved in ongoing training and leadership development and continual cycles of community organizing, which include relationship building, research, action/mobilization, and

evaluation/reflection. Organizing norms, such as listening, critical reflection, and shared analysis of social issues, cut across phases of the organizing cycle to build powerful organizations by creating a foundation of accountable relationships, interconnected collective interests, and a shared commitment to address root causes of social issues (Christens, Inzeo, & Faust, 2014). Through these processes, WISDOM affiliates not only engage new potential members but also build strategic partnerships with other organizations in order to advance social and systems changes.

The cycle of organizing generates a wide range of hypotheses of interest to WISDOM leadership with respect to the dynamics of the social issues it seeks to impact, as well as the process of mobilizing empowering relationships for social change. For example, since 2006, WISDOM had been working on a campaign to advance alternatives to incarceration as a means to rehabilitate those suffering from mental health and alcohol and other drug misuse issues. Through early phases of research and discussions with community members about common concerns, organizers and leaders suspected that increasing levels of incarceration were exacerbating health inequities in the state. To further investigate these impacts through a participatory research project, they sought out partnerships with Human Impact Partners, the Wisconsin Center for Health Equity, and researchers at the University of Wisconsin.

With support from these researchers, WISDOM engaged in a mixed methods health impact assessment (HIA) to evaluate the impacts of the policy option on the health of Wisconsin's residents. The purpose of the HIA was to predict future health impacts of a proposal in the state budget to provide \$75 million per year to Treatment Alternative and Diversion (TAD) programs. The study utilized data from the Department of Health Services; evaluations of previous TAD program implementation in the state from the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Population Health Institute; focus groups with formerly incarcerated individuals, judges, TAD program participants, and TAD program service providers; and a review of best-available science. The HIA report, *Healthier Lives, Stronger Families, Safer Communities: How Increasing Funding for Alternatives to Prison Will Save Lives and Money in Wisconsin*, was published in November 2012.

Through WISDOM's mobilization and collective action, those most affected by the issue—many of them formerly incarcerated people—were engaged as experts throughout the HIA. Others included professors, clergy, treatment providers, judges, and residents involved in shaping the scope of the HIA, as well as in collecting the quantitative and qualitative information that went into the final product. These individuals were a part of a daylong scoping meeting to identify specific TAD program interventions and impacts for further study. The HIA team drafted pathway diagrams based on this input and further refined them with feedback from participants. An advisory team made up of researchers, individuals from the State Public Defender's Office, and WISDOM and affiliate leaders finalized the scope, assisted in gathering and analyzing secondary data, shaped focus group data collection questions, and identified participants.

The HIA found that treatment alternatives reduce economic costs, reduce crime, increase recovery, strengthen families, and improve economic opportunity through employment. After the HIA was completed, nearly 60 people testified at various budget hearings, and more than 1,000 people attended a rally in Madison, followed by constituent visits to legislative offices. Every major media outlet in the state covered the release of the HIA findings, and many Republican and Democratic legislators pledged public support to an increase in funding for treatment alternatives in the state budget. As a result of this work, the budget for Treatment Alternatives and Diversions went up by 150%—from \$1 million/year to \$2.5 million/year—with continued increases anticipated. More generally, the HIA influenced Community Justice Reinvestment agendas at the state level to include discussions of mental health needs and shifted the state narrative from being “tough on crime” toward being “smart on crime.” The HIA partnerships demonstrated WISDOM’s ability to bring social and behavioral science research to bear on policy issues through a commitment to building social power to address root causes of disparities.

In addition to providing targeted research support on community impacts and health outcomes of social issues, opportunities for bridging research and action arose from WISDOM’s focus on relationship building, civic engagement, and empowerment through cycles of relational organizing. With an interest in learning more about

how its organizing processes sustain civic participation, WISDOM partnered with the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies to collect and analyze longitudinal information about its organizing settings and the participants who engage in these settings. Researchers specializing in civic participation, empowerment, and networks developed and implemented mobile participation data collection mechanisms and surveys, gathering individual- and setting-level data on patterns of involvement and impacts of participation. Although collection of participation data has only recently begun for this aspect of the research, the collaboration includes researchers with expertise in quantitative longitudinal and multilevel models in order to explore setting-level dynamics, such as neighborhood characteristics, social networks, and dynamics of local organizing initiatives, that promote civic participation.

Analyses of participation dynamics will assist WISDOM organizers in building more effective organizing environments—those that foster participation and the development of social power—and will simultaneously contribute to social science research on civic participation. For example, as part of a similar collaboration with community organizing groups, Christens and Speer (2011) reported an analysis of the influence of attendance at particular types of meetings as predictors of continued participation in organizing in successive years, finding that two particular types of meetings were predictive of continued engagement. This multilevel longitudinal model controlled for numerous other factors, including the influences of neighborhood-level variables, social networks, individual-level characteristics, and participants’ overall levels of involvement in previous years. These findings have not only been published for a social scientific audience but also have been broadly disseminated among community organizers, who value the insights that this type of evidence-based approach to their craft can yield. The tools and supporting analyses generated through this action research will help improve the internal processes of WISDOM that establish and support relationship and leadership development, increasing its capacity to build and exercise the social power needed to champion solutions that enhance community well-being.

The mixed methods action research partnership between WISDOM and the University of

Wisconsin–Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies now undergirds ongoing efforts to enhance community health and well-being. Together, organizing and academic partners have built the capacity of health promotion leaders and coalitions to increase their ability to equitably pursue policy, systems, and environmental changes to advance community health and health equity. The two groups have worked together to develop and provide training, technical assistance, and evaluation of 28 local coalitions across the state of Wisconsin pursuing changes to make their communities healthier places to live. They have also collaborated on building a statewide alliance between the field of community organizing and the field of public health, broadly defined.

The aforementioned efforts laid the groundwork for ramping up actions to build collective impact and community organizing initiatives to address the systems that have led to increases in obesity in Wisconsin. WISDOM and the University of Wisconsin–Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies are significantly involved in a 5-year statewide targeted obesity prevention initiative that began in 2014. This initiative seeks to prevent obesity through building local community capacity to pursue actions to effect systemic change so that healthier choices (e.g., active transportation, healthy eating) are easier to make. The initiative involves academic researchers from medicine, public health, urban planning, nutrition, landscape architecture, human ecology, and other disciplines. WISDOM is playing a key role in the project, including mentoring and supporting local community organizers who are leading efforts in local communities in collaboration with researchers. The research team is using multiple methods for research and evaluation, ranging from participant observation and qualitative interviews to the establishment of a statewide surveillance system to monitor changes in health behaviors and outcomes.

The action research partnership between this statewide network for community organizing and academic researchers continues to grow in breadth and depth. The projects described here reflect a variety of issue domains and involve basic cycles commonly associated with action research. More important, however, features of this case example highlight and reinforce the principles we proposed for designing and conducting action research earlier in the chapter. First, WISDOM's local

federations are not implementing an organizing model that was conceived by academics; they are independent entities that have developed expertise at building community power for systems change. Their organizing efforts align with some of the priorities and research interests of action-oriented researchers in the university, setting the stage for a community-academic partnership that generates additional opportunities for social action, as well as new paths of research. Second, University of Wisconsin–Madison researchers from various disciplines are engaged in different aspects of projects and working on teams as part of this action research partnership. Although it is not always easy to forge collaborations and synthesize work across disciplinary lines, it is often worth the effort to be able to more comprehensively address complex issues such as obesity and health equity. Third, both the researchers and community organizers involved in the partnership have built an understanding of the practical and theoretical aspects of the collaborative work. Community organizers in WISDOM have considerable capacity for integrating research into organizing processes. Researchers at the Center for Community & Nonprofit Studies have an interest in collaboratively designing action research. These facts create the potential for a powerful partnership to maximize impact on social issues.

CONCLUSION

Action research is an approach to generating knowledge and addressing social issues in pursuit of social justice. It can be conducted in many disciplines and even across disciplines. Those who conduct it cite a variety of influences and traditions but commonly identify both a desire to bring about change through conducting research and the view that theory and research can be enhanced through close proximity to action and/or practice. Action research can, therefore, be seen as a testing ground for the utility of theory, for new methods in the social sciences, and for new combinations of ideas and methods from various disciplines and fields of practice.

Many intellectual and practical challenges exist for those seeking to build and sustain programs of action research. Nevertheless, we would urge more researchers to take up these challenges and launch collaborative action research projects with community and organizational partners. We believe that

action research can play a key role in producing scientific evidence needed to tackle persistent social problems. Furthermore, we believe that action research is a promising strategy for multiplying the direct roles that social science can play in the resolution of social issues and promotion of community well-being.

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