

Call For Papers

Special Issue of the *Action Research Journal*:

Action Research for Transforming the Poverty Field.

To be considered, papers must arrive for peer review by March 18, 2022.

The goal of the proposed special issue of the *Action Research Journal* is to focus on both the potential and the challenges of action research for transforming the field of poverty. In 2019 an international research team of academics, practitioners and people facing poverty argued that poverty must be understood as both *relational* (e.g. social maltreatment, institutional maltreatment, and unrecognized contributions) and as a *core experience* (suffering in body, mind, and heart; disempowerment; and struggle and resistance). Their study identified nine key dimensions of poverty, six of which were previously hidden or rarely considered in policy discussion (Bray et al, 2019). Joseph Wresinski¹ (Wresinski, 2001, 98-99), who himself grew up in extreme poverty and coined the term “social exclusion,” wrote that (people living in poverty) tell us over and over again that man’s greatest misfortune is not to be hungry or unable to read, nor even to be without work... (but) to know that you count for nothing, to the point where even your suffering is ignored. The worst blow of all is the contempt on the part of your fellow citizens.” Unless these relational and experiential dimensions are addressed, the purported decline in poverty means little to the people most affected by it.

We argue that poverty can be seen as a social “field” composed of patterned relationships among individual and institutional actors that generate this core experience of suffering (Friedman, 2011). Transforming the field means not simply relieving suffering, but at reshaping the relationships that sustain it. In this regard, the “wealthy” of society are no less a part of the poverty field and its transformation than the so-called “poor.” Furthermore, since social fields are created by people, they can only be changed by the people who create, or at least sustain, them through their actions at the individual and/or institutional level.

Action research for transformation (ART) puts a particular focus on developmental reflexivity, bringing these people, or stakeholders, together in learning processes that enable them to develop a critical awareness of, and then reshape, the patterned interactions and relationships that make up the field (Bradbury et al, 2019). Rather than reducing one group to being the “objects” of transformational efforts of others, transformation regards *all* stakeholders as learners acting to co-create a new social reality. In addition, ART leverages fundamental shifts in thinking, feeling, and action that can spread beyond the individual case or community to impact wider fields or systems.

This journal has published many papers illustrating how good participatory action research can help relieve suffering and improve the lives of people living in poverty in different contexts around the world (e.g. Collins, 2005, Loignon et al, 2020, Seferiadis et al, 2017). This special issue, however, wishes to take a step beyond a focus on first-order

¹ Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988) was the founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World to eradicate extreme poverty. This chapter was originally prepared in French for the French Commission on Human Rights at the occasion of the bicentennial of the French revolution.

changes. We invite the submission of manuscripts that illustrate transformational action research aimed at changing the relationships and patterned interactions among stakeholders with the potential for reshaping the field. For example, Rosenfeld and Tardieu (2000) illustrated how families living in poverty, large social institutions, and social movements became allies in making fundamental changes among all individual and the institutional stakeholders.

This action research would have to involve *people and/or communities with a lived experience of poverty* and their relationships with other stakeholders, such as *practitioners, institutions, policy makers, academic researchers, and ordinary citizens*. We would like to emphasize that manuscripts do not necessarily have to be based on successful action research projects. We greatly value learning from failure, as well as from success, as long as the authors take a *developmentally reflexive* approach that enables others to learn from their experience and potentially contributes to actionable practice knowledge.

The following list of issues and related questions reflects what we wish to explore in this special issue:

- 1. Participatory methodology, power, and those furthest behind.** The level and quality of participation and engagement is a critical issue in ART with people experiencing poverty. It is important for researchers to relate how they and other stakeholders actually engaged with people experiencing poverty, thinking critically together with them about issues, and understanding their truths. Therefore, we welcome manuscripts that address the following questions:
 - What innovative participatory methods have been developed for engaging people and communities experiencing poverty in ART?
 - What can we learn about the sharing of power and place in action research processes involving people living in poverty and other stakeholders? What does “power” actually mean in particular contexts? How can action research facilitate true power sharing and authentic relationships of reciprocity among stakeholders in racial, ethnic, gender and cultural contexts that are laden with power imbalances and in community contexts where there are divisive pushes and pulls?
 - How have action researchers attempted to equalize power in participative research processes, from start to completion, including co-authorship and dissemination? For example, how do researchers respond when community partners reject their initial questions and framing the research. Do they try to understand it and go with rather just stay with what they originally intended?
 - How can action research reach and involve people experiencing poverty who are furthest behind and enable their voices to be heard? It is particularly challenging to reach and sustain engagement with people who live transient lives and are so occupied with survival. As a result, researchers tend to work with community leaders and those who can be most easily reached (Miller et al, 1970). These strategies often contribute to strengthening the poverty field by reinforcing existing power structures and arrangements. Those most excluded are important precisely because they are the first to suffer from violence, environmental degradation, and other societal ills. People who are the least powerful, who are unseen and/or who are the least accepted, even by other people living in poverty, have a great deal to teach us. They have experiences and knowledge that, if heard, are critically important for challenging the system and stimulating transformation.

2. **Transforming the poverty field and its discourse.** Action research for transforming the poverty field looks beyond local improvements to illustrate how change can be scaled-up to the institutional or even system/field level. Furthermore, one of the important components of transformation is changing the discourse that shapes thinking and action such as “shame-free” policies by not using shameful words (Bray et al, 2019). Therefore, we welcome manuscripts that address the following questions:
 - How are institutions that serve people living in poverty changed through action research? What is the relationship between individual change among stakeholders and institutional change?
 - What mechanisms and processes spread, expand, multiply, and scale up local, small scale projects dealing with poverty? What happens when transformation goes to scale? How is it possible to maintain genuine participation and co-creation when processes are scaled-up, disseminated, and/or go to the system/field level?
 - How can ART disrupt and transform the traditional “othering” discourse that totalizes and dehumanizes entire populations by labelling them as “the poor” or “the excluded”? This discourse enables people with more privilege or living in more comfortable circumstances to maintain a cold distance from the harsh realities of life for people/communities experiencing poverty and to ignore their assets and contributions to society.
 - What does the transformation of the poverty field actually mean in different contexts and how can we know that it has actually taken place and to what extent? How has transformation, as an outcome of action research, been illustrated, evaluated, or even measured?

3. **Building social solidarity.** Living in poverty often entails an experience of economic, social, and cultural isolation. Isolation refers not just to relationships with mainstream society but also within and among families and individuals who live within communities that experience poverty. Therefore, we welcome manuscripts that address the following questions:
 - How can action research facilitate or contribute to social solidarity among people experiencing poverty as well as with other stakeholders?
 - What role can ART play in helping people living in poverty create and/or spread economic, social, and/or cultural cooperatives and/or other organizational forms that enable them to overcome isolation, meet needs, demand their rights, and/or contribute to society?
 - How does community ownership happen? What is the journey like, what are the conundrums along the way, and what new learnings and transformational changes happened for those involved?

4. **Impact on knowledge and knowers.** In addition to discovering new insights, concepts, methods, or ideas regarding the transformation of the poverty field, we are interested bridging the gap between action research and mainstream academia. Researchers who work in local, academic institutions in geographic and/or social peripheries often face strong pressure to conform to mainstream “scientific” methods that make it difficult for them to engage the communities closest to them. Furthermore, they often find themselves excluded by an academic establishment that

favor highly abstract knowledge generated in relatively powerful national institutions. Therefore, we welcome papers that address the following kinds of questions:

- How can ART have an impact on mainstream academics? If there were academic researchers involved in ART, in what ways did they change as a result of the endeavor? How has their participation changed participatory action research?
- How can researchers conduct action research that has both a transformative effect at the local, community level and also speak to the mainstream research community?

5. **The ethics of action research with people living in poverty.** Despite good intentions, professional researchers often benefit much more than the people and communities with whom they conduct action research. Furthermore, ART may entail potential dangers for people living in poverty or other stakeholders. For example, in their action research on poverty alleviation among women in Bangladesh, Sefiradis et al (2017) realized that that transformative change threatened the social relations in which the women were embedded and which gave meaning to their lives. Rather than push their transformative agenda, they chose to work towards more limited, incremental changes. Since so little is known about the implications of ART for people living in poverty, we welcome papers that address the following questions:

- What are the ethical implications of ART for transforming the poverty field in different contexts?
- How do action researchers ensure that people experiencing poverty are not simply being used, especially as “guinea pigs,” and that the research process does not reinforce past trauma or create new trauma?
- How can ethical principles related to partnership in action research, such as distinction between “contractual” ethics and “relational” ethics (Brydon-Miller, et al, 2015) be applied in ART with people experiencing poverty.

Editorial Team

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Note to Authors

We publish work reviewed according to 7 Quality Choice-points (Bradbury et al, 2020), and ask that you pay close attention to those as you prepare your manuscript (available at this link: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1476750320904562>.)

Make sure to review our Author Resources which describe - in a way considered more transparent than most - what we look for from authors, such as preparation for blind review: <http://journals.sagepub.com/page/arj/authors-resources>.

Our companion AR+ website, <https://actionresearchplus.com>, enables the publication of material in multi-media format, including video. We welcome submissions that take creative advantage of this opportunity. We will do our best to host translations of any accepted English manuscripts on our companion website.

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- ARJ makes every effort to be as inclusive of diversity as possible. We welcome creativity beyond what we have sketched as possible foci.
- Full drafts of papers should be submitted through our online submission process (go to <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ARJ> for details) no later than (TBA).
- All papers should follow standard ARJ submission recommendations, which length of 5000–7000 words inclusive, using APA style.
- Include the words Transforming Poverty Special Issue to your paper upon submission.

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