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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WHAT HAPPENED TO ACTION RESEARCH? AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLICATIONS IN THE PRINCIPAL SPANISH JOURNALS OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In this article we present a review of articles on action research published in five prestigious Spanish education journals. We provide a summary of what was edited from three types of publications: 1) Reflection to the topic. 2) Research carried out. 3) Experiences carried out. This analysis provides the International scientific community with a rigorously researched and contrasted view of the style of thought and action in the Spanish educational community regarding this theoretical-practical form of research.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years we have been witnessing a gradual decline in research-action as a strategy for improving teaching. This is due, although not exclusively so, to what Gimeno (1996) said when writing regretfully about the failure of the figure of "teacher". The challenge for overcoming this failure was taken up by action research, upon advocating the need for cultured teachers in the pedagogical processes, with a good knowledge of cultural problems, in the understanding that changes cannot be undertaken unless the ideas underpinning them have been taken on personally.

Let us recall... the origin and conceptualization of Action Research

The doctrinaire origin of action research has to be situated in the 1950s in the ideas of John Dewey, who advocated the link between *thought* and *action*, *democracy* and *participation*, though the psychologist Kurt Lewin was responsible for the term action research when he became concerned with the *scientific study of human relations*, with special attention to changes in attitudes and prejudice. Lewin coined that term to designate a spiral step process in which each step comprises planning, action and evaluation of the result of the action: he defended the idea that during research it is necessary for professionals to collaborate with the persons to whom the intervention proposals are being addressed.

Conceptual aspects

Corey (1953, 16) conceived of action research as the process by which practitioners attempt to study their problems scientifically in order systematically to guide, correct and evaluate their decisions and their actions.

Thus, research action is carried out by... practitioners! (Sandín, 2010). No mention is made of scientific experts, or educational technicians or managers. So what do practitioners study? Well, they study their own decisions and actions. The aim is thus to analyse and evaluate one's own professional practice, its principles, actions and outcomes, in the real context in which it takes place and with the individuals it involves.

For Carr and Kemmis (1988, 174), "action-research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out".

In short, action research is not a technical prescription; it requires involvement, commitment and bonds with certain educational values and goals, and at the same time an attentive look at one's own role and teaching function in a process of change.

3. What model of teacher does action research advocate?

Certain images regarding the role and work of teachers underlie the action research movement and they can help us to

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understand and respond to the requirements of teachers' professional practice.

Teachers as “self-reflective professionals”

Teachers should possess a reflective culture that enables them to exercise their profession while constantly questioning the situation in which they are intervening, and that provides them with the ability to analyse the bases of their actions and their consequences, thus keeping their educational motivation and transformation alive.

Teachers as “researchers”

The teacher-researcher movement promoted by Lawrence Stenhouse in the 1970s has helped educators to conceive of teachers as creators of educational knowledge in relation to teaching and learning.

Teaching knowledge

The competencies that teachers acquire through their initial training or through other means are necessary but not sufficient; they must also attain know-how, which for the most part is tacit, and becomes activated in the action itself, knowledge that teachers continuously weave into their daily pedagogical work.

Action research thus emerged from the questions and concerns of teachers that were formulated from the experience and knowledge gained from their constant immersion in the world of everyday experience.

Materials used on the published research about action in the Spanish educational journals

To answer this question, we refer to the records of five important Spanish pedagogical journals, if not the most important ones in the Spanish scenario: *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, *Revista de Educación*, *Bordón* and *Revista de Investigación Educativa y Enseñanza*. Our principal selection criterion for the articles was that they had been valid over the last 25 years and whose title included the term “action research” or one of its components, such as collaborative action, or reflective action, as long as they were related to one of the objectives orientating that methodology. The article title, then, was the basis for the selection.

Below we provide information on certain aspects relating to these journals and the topic being analysed, over the last 25 years, as stated above:

Table 1 Articles total

REVISTAS	N total of articles	N action research	Coefficient
Revista de Educación	1069	17	0,0159
Revista Española de Pedagogía	608	4	0,0065
Bordon	845	6	0,0071
Revista de Investigación Educativa	552	6	0,0108
Enseñanza & Teaching	329	14	0,0334
Total	3403	47	-----

Although we are aware that thematic contexts in Pedagogy are many and varied, the information displayed above leads us to think that the topic of action research has not been a determinant concern for the journals analysed.

At this point we must be clear that it is not our aim to make a content analysis like the ones begun in their day by Berelson (1952), Holsti (1969), Lasswell or Leites (1949), but rather a systematic review, as specified in the following Table, differentiating it from other types of document analysis:

Table 2 Extracted from Sackett, D *et al.* (2005): *Clinical Epidemiology: a basic science clinical medicine*

Revisión	“el término general para todo intento que sintetice los resultados y las conclusiones de dos o más publicaciones relacionadas con un tema dado”
Sistemática	“cuando una revisión se esfuerza en la identificación exhaustiva, a través de toda la literatura de un tema dado, valorando su calidad y sintetizando sus resultados”
Metaanálisis	“cuando una revisión sistemática incorpora una estrategia estadística específica para reunir los resultados de varios estudios en una sola estimación”

Our review actually starts from articles already previously evaluated to a certain extent, since in the journals we have selected all the articles published have been evaluated and selected by means of double blind peer review, which in principle means a quality guarantee of the articles finally selected:

The teacher-consultant and collaborative design of the assessment plan

This article is merely descriptive of a situation in which this new conception of teacher is being applied in some Spanish schools, based on experimenting with a collaborative image. It designs the future work of consultant and prepares a plan for action revolving around school and practice, perceived as a need, and consequently demanded and self-managed by the group to provide answers to what is lacking in this type of practice, shared by all those involved and with a tendency to innovate the culture of the classroom (Lorenzo, 1992).

An example of reflection research in the teacher training

This research work posits the need to surpass traditional methodologies that focused on the teacher by transferring the responsibility for educational reform onto the teacher as the principle figure in this transformation, understanding the renewal of teaching through renovation of the methods through which future teachers are trained (Rodrigo, 1992).

The teacher as reflective practitioner in a culture of collaboration

This article posits as its fundamental objective to describe and interpret pedagogical knowledge based on teachers' inquiries into practice to improve the educational culture of a particular school, considered a framework for developing a professional culture (Villar, 1994).

Development of an action research group to collaborate on innovative curricular projects

This article summarises the description of work carried out by a group of teachers in upper-secondary education in regard to the idea promulgated by action research involving innovative curricular design. It focuses attention on curricular innovation through the design and implementation of a curricular classroom project for the subject of Science in the first year of upper secondary education (Suarez, 1998).

Is a culture of collaboration possible among teaching staff?

The author of this article considers that the value of autonomy and collaboration in schools will not change or improve unless teachers are incentivized, working conditions improved and

the means that this new culture of participation requires set in place. Neither words nor curricular or legislative documents alone can change things in schools; renewal unquestionably depends on the preparation and attitudes of teachers. The professional development of teachers, which consists in conceiving teaching practice as a constant process of learning, experimenting and shared reflection, will give rise to the creation of projects that will interest and satisfy not only the students but also the teachers themselves, the protagonists of their own creative development (Clemente, 1999).

Collaborative research and university education

This article synthesises an experience carried out over three years with university students. It involved forming a team of collaborators and undertaking collaborative research into Motor Functions and Creativity. The experience was meant to overcome students' passivity, involving them actively in their own training and no longer allowing them to be mere passive receivers of information. (Garcia y Trigo, 2000).

Collaboration among Primary Education teachers. Results of two descriptive studies.

In this article we find the results of two studies about working relationships in two primary schools in regard to teaching staff collaboration (Santana y Padrón, 2001).

Community assessment and the reinvention of teachers

This article explores a more committed approach to community assessment in education. It analyses the consequences that social trends such as dissociation and individualisation in social matters have on teachers, schools and society at large (Rodríguez, 2006).

Community education

In this work an attempt is made to establish the foundations of what can be understood as community education, as a process of cascading interventions and promotion of participation and community organization (Cieza, 2001).

Participatory assessment as training in physical education

The objective of this study was to learn how important it is for students to have the teacher yield responsibility in the assessment of the subject Physical Education (Moreno, Vera y Cervello, 2006).

The design of collaborative learning environments using the Knowledge Forum programme. Analysis of an experience

The article approaches the problematics involved in the design of collaborative learning environments with technological media at university level. It describes the research carried out in the creation of a task-orientated methodology (problem-solving using a technological format and the Knowledge Forum platform) (Alvarez y otros, 2005).

Student portfolios: an action research study in the university classroom

This article presents an experience involving innovation, research and action carried out at the University of Granada. The principal aim of the experience was to bring a teaching and assessment resource to the university classroom: student portfolios. The study analyses the opinions that the participating students had of the experience and presents

conclusions in relation to the research objectives pursued (Garcia y Pozo, 2006).

Teaching by projects: an action research study in sixth year of Primary Education

Following an action research methodology, teaching initiatives were designed, carried out and assessed with a view to improving teaching through projects at school. The outcomes indicate that pupils' participation increased at all stages of the project. (López y Lacueva, 2007).

Collaborative work in the university classroom: reflections based on self-assessment

The gradual implantation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is making it possible to introduce certain changes in the teaching-learning processes that take place in university classrooms. Thus, self-assessment and collaborative work in small groups are the methodological and evaluative strategies teachers are using more and more. This article presents the results of a study into how university students evaluated collaborative group work (Ibarra y Rodríguez, 2007).

Virtual interaction and collaborative learning. A qualitative study

This article is a mere contribution to our knowledge of what it means to delve theoretically deeper into empirical analyses that will enable us to better understand the process of social interaction that takes place in virtual education (Del Dujo y Suarez, 2001).

Research-reflection-action and counselling: analysis of the reflections of two guidance counsellors in their job context

Research-reflection-action can be understood as (1) a problem-solving process (2) that leads to awareness and (3) generates new professional knowledge. The objective of this work is to analyse how the first of these traits is manifested when two counsellors reflect upon their counselling work (García, Mena y Sánchez, 2001).

Collaborative learning in communities of practice in contexts of social exclusion

This article analyses the educational interactions that enable a context of collaboration to be created. The study was carried out in a particular form of community of practice.

What do the participants do to make the interaction work? And to collaborate? What indicates that they form part of this community? And that they share knowledge of the specific game or task? (Luque y Lasnueza, 2011).

Parent participation at school. A reform of community intervention for school difficulties

In this article the importance of parent participation at school is highlighted as psycho-pedagogical support for the school when problems need to be addressed. (Martinez, 1992)

Classroom case studies: an alternative in action research

In action research the actual skills of the teaching staff and their ability to reflect on their work come into play:

A normal *professional reflection*, which is manifested in the ability to learn from one's own errors.

A *systematic reflection*, when all the skills and knowledge of the teacher are focused on investigating and finding answers to a specific and clearly delimited problem.

The *case study*, which contains the two previous levels but framed within a context, written for a public purpose, and that is meant to be rigorous, detailed and coherent (Carretero y Saez, 1993).

The community school

This article attempts to set out the foundations of community schools in order subsequently to set certain objectives, which the school cannot achieve alone, but which can be attained through an adequate school-community relationship. Below we have the three stages necessary for making a school open to the community:

- Stage 1: *All the teaching staff must understand that they face the challenge* of including community-related projects in the curriculum.
- Stage 2: Information on the educational projects must be given to parents.
- Stage 3: The school must coordinate with the community: businesses, institutions, public services (Menendez, 1993).

Theoretical perspectives regarding the effects of cooperative learning on student performance

This article presents six theoretical perspectives that explain the effects that cooperative learning methods have on student performance. These perspectives can be described as follows: *motivational, social cohesion, cognitive, development, cognitive elaboration, practice and classroom organization* (Toledo, 1994).

The discussion of case studies of expert and novice teachers as a strategy for promoting more reflective practices in teacher training

An attempt is made in this article to analyse a model of reflective practices based on discussions of cases of expert and novice teachers, as well as guided discussions, as tools for inducing reflective processes (Moral y Pérez, 1996).

Action-research experience to analyse the need for cooperation between families and schools

The aim of this study was to analyse the possibilities offered by the action research methodology to evaluate the needs of schools in relation to cooperation with families. A school's degree of community involvement is studied through the activities of an action-research group comprising parents, teachers, students and a university researcher (Martínez, 1997).

Conceptual contributions and strategies to promote teacher reflection on practice with didactic methods

In the development of research into teaching, a series of approaches and conceptions about teachers has emerged, such as *trained manager, decision-maker and reflective practitioner*; the first two form part of a conception known as *technical rationality*, whereas that of the teacher as *reflective practitioner* predominates today (Gallego, 1994)

Gnoseological structure and limits of critical action research

This article attempts to study the basic structure underlying action research to intervene in school practice. There are several trends and orientations within it, all of which present a conception of education, curricular design, school practice and

a teaching methodology. Critical action research is developed on the model of *practical rationality* (Rodríguez, 2207).

The importance of collaborative work in the treatment of child motor function. An integral proposal based on induced learning

A specific proposal is presented about how to work on motor function in early childhood education, based on the use of induced learning with a clearly integral and overall approach (López, 2008).

Cooperative learning. The role of socio-cognitive conflict in intellectual development

This article addresses the importance of socio-cognitive conflict in students' intellectual development. Taking the perspective of the social nature of cognitive development it analyses how socialisation, personal development and intellectual progress go hand in hand, and the role of interaction among peers and with the teacher as the driver of this growth (Gavilán, 2009).

The reflective teacher: a new model of teaching professional

In this article we find a conceptualisation of what a reflective professional should be, and it emerges as an alternative to traditional models, with an understanding of reflection (Latorre, 1992).

Action research as a methodology of theorisation and teacher education based on practice

This article offers the possibility to learn about a project in line with the new normative demands and has a dual purpose:

- To help teachers to acquire the research capabilities of observation, reflection, analysis, systematisation, and so on, that will allow them to make an accurate diagnosis of problems in the classroom.
- To offer alternative actions and to introduce educational improvement and curricular innovation (López, 1992).

Cooperative professional development: The study of an experience

Within the framework of a cooperative research study, this article presents the organisation of research groups comprised of experts and professionals in educational practice to work on the problems that concern the latter (Martínez, 1992).

An experience in cooperative research. The methodology of intervention in an open medium

This article describes a collaborative research line developed in Catalonia by university lecturers in Education and delegates from the Office for the Protection of Minors, aimed at devising a reference framework that considers an intervention methodology in an Open Medium: objectives of the intervention, the process (with its strategies), and intervention and evaluation techniques (with their techniques and instruments) (Amorós y otros, 1992).

An experience in cooperative research at the University of Oviedo

A modest experience of a group of upper secondary education teachers coordinated by a university lecturer is presented in this article. From the perspective of action research, based on improving educational practice (Santiago, 1992).

How popular education relates to formal education. Participatory research

The work presented in this article corresponds to a participatory research process carried out over two years in the Dominican Republic (Acosta y Bartolomé, 1992).

Teacher education in collaboration. A theoretical-practical justification and evaluation.

This article presents perceptions that are confirmed by a series of starting hypotheses. Collaborative reflection stands out as aid for teachers to develop the capacity to understand their own practice and improve upon it (Medina, 1994).

Cooperative and autonomous learning in the university context

In this work certain aspects prior to the sense in which university teaching and training should be considered are highlighted: educating humanist subjects studies are reviewed that contribute new perspectives for improving university teaching (Escribano, 1995).

Some considerations about the critical-social theory of teaching

The study of the different perspectives of organization is of great interest for going deeper into our knowledge of the evolution of teaching and schools. Critical social theory is understood as a model from power and the interaction that takes place at the heart of organizations (Fernández, 1995)

Social participation as the nucleus of learning

An attempt was made to promote popular and formal education in marginalised areas, with the school and the educational community taking an active role in the social transformation and organising of the working classes (Martinez y Sauleda, 1992b).

Educational demands of the action research model

This article contains a mere description of the methodological demands of action research, in its educational aspects and as a transforming process in education (López, 1991)

Action research in formal and non-formal education

Action research is described here as pertaining to a critical and unique paradigm linked to improvement of professional practice and orientated towards transformation and change in both formal and non-formal educational contexts (Pérez y Nieto, 1992-1993)

Research methodology based on discussion groups

This work revolves around discussion groups as a technique for collecting qualitative data and the possibility of which is starting to be considered by researchers in education. (Gil, 1992-1993).

Teacher education in collaboration. A theoretical-practical justification and evaluation

This article presents perceptions that are confirmed by a series of starting hypotheses. Collaborative reflection stands out as an aid for teachers to develop the capacity to understand their own practice and improve upon it (Medina, 1994).

Cooperative and autonomous learning in the university context

In this work certain aspects prior to the sense in which university teaching and training should be considered are highlighted: educating humanist subjects who are cooperative, investigative and reflexive. In addition, significant research studies are reviewed that contribute new perspectives for improving university teaching (Escribano, 1995)

Some considerations about the critical-social theory of teaching

The study of the different perspectives of organisation is of great interest for going deeper into our knowledge of the evolution of teaching and schools. Critical social theory is understood as a model derived from power and the interaction that takes place at the heart of organizations (Fernández, 1995)

Social participation as the nucleus of learning

This article analyses a research study aimed at learning and reviewing the preconceived conceptual frameworks that future teachers have as part of the implementation of methodological strategies concentrated in social participation (Martinez y Sauleda, 1997b).

Collaborative learning in the university context

The main objective of this research study was to analyse the use of constructionist and collaborative strategies in the scenario of teacher education, starting from the hypothesis that change is more effective when implemented in a synergic way with strategies that foster group autonomy and co-regulation of learning rhythms and intentionality (Martinez y Sauleda, 1997a).

Learning reflective teaching in the context of the student teaching practicum

This article forms part of an interdisciplinary project of collaborative action research focused on learning how to teach reflectively in the context of the student teaching practicum. It describes an evaluation of the experience and the portfolio used by the participating teachers in the university (Alda y otros, 1998).

Can reflection be stimulated in the supervisor and student teacher during the practicum?

This work shows how an exercise in reflective supervision stimulates reflection in student teachers and in their supervisors during the practicum (Pérez, 2006).

E-Collaboration among teachers using ICT tools

The development of an experience in educational innovation is presented in this article. It comes under the framework of the ARCE programme of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (Iglesias y Lezcano, 2013)

Collaborative multimedia projects for teaching the nervous system and its relation to pain to students in third year of compulsory secondary education

This article is based on the idea that ICT modify and condition the form of our interactions with our environment and with other people.

The results from using a methodology of ICT-based collaborative teaching as opposed to those obtained with a

classical methodology used in teaching according to the subject matter are presented (González, 2012).

Google Docs: A collaborative work experience at university level

This work describes the experience of a collaborative work group at university level addressed to verifying the new educational possibilities provided by ICT through their different applications and tools. With these devices, students can work at their own rhythm and make contributions to the rest of the group, having positive repercussions on the learning process of all the members (Delgado y Casado, 2012)

Network collaboration and citizen education from the point of view of an Andalusian teacher

By means of an internet questionnaire it was found that teachers positively assess collaboration and are willing to become involved in educational projects and open education up to the community; in addition, when their usual collaborative relations are specified, a moderate network of contacts and their intensity was observed (Morales y otros, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION THEREON

Rom this moment, we conducted comprehensive evaluations on all jobs, regardless of what the magazine has been published, thereby complying with the title of this work.

The works published show great variety and different perspectives according to each work and each author; in order to show all of them together, and to provide a better understanding, we have classified them into three categories, as shown in Table 3

Table 3 Classification of the articles

Valoración general	N	%
Descriptive	23	48,9
REsearch	11	23,4
Experiences	13	27,7
Total	47	100,0

As can be seen in Table 3 the data lead us to conclude that most of the articles present a merely *descriptive* orientation of what action research is or some of its modalities or components. Nonetheless, all the descriptive reflections are different from each other and show a broad range of perspectives, although not all of them coincide with the doctrine arising from action research.

Of maximum interest is the fact that a disappointing trend can be perceived throughout these articles, and that is that when writing, the teachers themselves are thinking about how the topic affects other teachers, without including themselves in the very doctrine they seem to be preaching. We believe this can only negatively affect the very philosophy of the methodology.

Only a few *experiences* have been described in these works, and this is due mainly to the low level of direct involvement of the authors in the experiences described.

We believe that most of these authors usually have a rather good idea of what action research is all about, yet they seem to be somewhat removed from the professional involvement this type of research entails. This leads us to consider that this methodology is plagued with too much doctrinaire theorisation and too little professional commitment.

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