

## Editorial

The present (7<sup>th</sup>) issue of the e-journal *Action Researcher in Education* (June 2016), through the eight articles it includes, focuses on the dynamic and critical orientation that educational action research can have. The action research projects presented in this issue, carried out either by teachers and students in formal and non formal educational contexts or by student-teachers, aim at undermining dominant social hierarchies and the implications they have in education settings. Even the theoretical articles of this issue either refer critically on the official educational policy of the European Union or on the perspectives and difficulties that arise from the critical orientation of educational action research.

More specifically:

The first two articles concern mainly the teaching and learning processes and the ways through which students can be actively engaged in them. Both of these articles present and discuss practices that can upgrade students' role in the educational process.

A group of postgraduate students, Anyfanti, Arvanitaki - Kammenou, Violntzi, Giannopoulou, Dimitrakopoulou, Zourou, Katsiardi and Chouli in their article *Students as a valid knowledge base for the production of educational material* try to show how students' knowledge and their personal experience can be used in classroom as sources of valid educational material. They propose ways for this educational material to be produced by collecting intact student texts or/and by making specific interventions to them. The teacher has a key role, as he/she can combine students' with academic knowledge. Within constructivistic framework, students' personal experiences are redefined as learning ones. In this direction, a variety of alternative applications and a set of activities are proposed, usable in all language courses. The "by students - for students" material that will be produced each time by the teacher can cover ways of approaching both the theoretical knowledge and the practical applications of it. This attempt of producing teaching material is a challenge for the way of teaching and marks a fundamental change in the educational context for students and teachers alike.

In their article entitled *'My world, a click': The contribution of the art of photography to the development of multiliteracies in two public kindergartens of Athens*, the two authors, Vouvousira and Fakou, highlight the contribution of the art of photography to the reinforcement of multiliteracies. Based on the project

'My world, a click', carried out during the school year 2013-14, the authors claim that children's work on photography - which reflected their interests, experiences, and daily life - cultivated further their verbal communication, writing skills, and visual literacy. The article focuses on data from two kindergartens, in which the authors have served as teachers. The methodology followed was action research. Data collection was carried out through observation, discussion, children's creations, and the journals kept by participants. The conclusions of the research are really interesting. First, of all, it seems that the art of photography gave children a voice. Their speech and writing skills were developed and they utilized their experiences for self-expression, familiarization with others, cooperation, and understanding the world around them. The children developed a specialized visual vocabulary and created multimodal works by combining various communication systems (photo-stories, moving pictures/animation, photo collage, captions, posters, and invitations). By creating visual forms, children engaged in communication and became critical readers of pictures. By placing their experiences in front of the camera and focusing on what is important for them, children became active agents in the social context.

Next article focuses on the contribution of educational action research in teachers' education, and more specifically in their pre-service program.

Thomas G. Ryan, Professor at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario Canada, in his article *The Pre-Service Educator as Action Researcher and Leader* starts with the assumption that action research is a means to investigate practical issues and can be employed to improve the practice of education, with pre-service teachers-researchers studying their own problems or issues in a school or other educational setting. The author views action research as a reflective habit of mind, crucial for teachers to be effective, as it can be infused into practice; and he concludes in the end that a level of freedom can be realized in pre-service teaching via action research.

The next two articles refer to the movement of Critical Pedagogy. The first focuses on the ways through which a university course on critical pedagogy can be developed, presenting Professor's reflections on it, while the second discusses the contribution of action research to the constant meaning-(re)construction of the emancipatory vision of Critical Pedagogy.

In her article *Creativity and Critical Pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education*, Yvonne Hill presents a case study from a student- teachers' education Program at the University. She presents her work as a teacher committed to adopting

critical pedagogy in the university based programme for initial teacher education in England. The study revolves around twenty six postgraduate students with subject specialism in Sociology, Psychology and Politics. At the time of this study (2011) trainee teachers required a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in order to teach the 14-19 curriculum in England. The PGCE consisted of a total of twelve weeks on a university based programme and a practicum of twenty four weeks in two different school or college placements. The paper articulates the social agency of the PGCE course leader and her commitment to facilitating a programme of study that encouraged trainee teachers to gain confidence, competence and creativity in their professional practice. As advocate of active professionalism, the author proposes here enactment of pedagogical subject knowledge within curriculum delivery and hears the voices of trainee teachers in being challenged emotionally intellectually and professionally. This ethnographic case study offers three areas for discussion and analysis: firstly it offers rich ethnographic description of the critical pedagogy being formulated by trainee teachers in developing critical thinking skills for global citizenship. Secondly it presents a vivid account of the use of film in engaging young people with citizenship issues that bear witness to teachers' personal, political and professional positioning in relation to the global state. Finally the study offers critical discourse analysis of how the intersectionality between pedagogy, politics and the creative media industry serve to open up spaces for young peoples' critical engagement with cultural text.

Vassilis Tsafos, in his article *Critical Pedagogy and Action Research: exploring the emancipatory perspectives in the postmodern educational context*, explores the perspectives for emancipation that could be created through the combination of action research with critical pedagogy. In postmodernity all values, even the emancipatory educational ones that consist priority for the movement of Critical Pedagogy, cannot be considered a priori accepted by the participants, legitimized by criteria of normative validity. On the contrary, they have to emerge from shared beliefs that are constructed gradually and are legitimized coincidentally through reflective and participative procedures. Educational action research (especially its critical version) can contribute significantly to these procedures. The study presented here aims at defining the interconnection between Critical Pedagogy and Action Research exploring the perspectives created by this combination for the continuous search of emancipation, in an inclusive

context that allows constant (re)construction of the meaning of emancipation by all the participants. So the article focuses not only on the inquiring and reflective context that can be created by the above combination, but also on the necessary prerequisites for teachers' and students' engagement in co-operative pursuit of values and attitudes.

Next article presents and discusses an educational intervention that has action research characteristics and critical orientation. It is written by Associate Professor in the University of Athens, Alexandra Androusou and her students (future teachers). The educational intervention was planned and carried out by the Department of Early Childhood Education in the open refugee hosting structure of Elaionas. In the article emphasis is given on the causes and conditions that led to the decision of conducting such intervention (studies' reflective orientation of the specific department and its social character), the factors that shaped the planning of the intervention (the situation mapping, the understanding and analysis of the historic and socio-political context) and the evolution of the intervention in the field following the stages of action research (planning, implementation, evaluation and reflection). Besides, the various benefits that the participants (refugee-children, professor-coordinator and student-teachers) had are discussed.

The two final articles of the 7<sup>th</sup> issue are theoretical. The first refers to the educational policy in the countries of the European Union, while the second explores and discusses the perspectives created by the use of action research in educational communities of learning.

The doctoral students Albulene Grajcevcic and Arif Shala, in their article *Formal and Non-Formal Education in the New Era*, focus on issues of European educational policy. The recent economic crisis in Europe has reshaped the way education is perceived. Admittedly, education has been considered as one of the pillars that can push Europe towards economic stability. Consequently, in recent years we have witnessed growing investments in education. The much needed money flows have made an impact, however the situation is less than ideal as many urgent problems have been overlooked and continue to prevail. Europe is facing the problem of the economization of education, not providing students with the skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the reduced quality of teaching. It is our argument that three factors which will have a positive impact include using new technologies in education, teaching digital competencies, and finally

highlighting learning styles preferences to engage all students in learning. It is the aim of this work to provide evidence that incorporating the three recommendations will result in improved education outcomes in Europe.

George Polyzois in his article *Action Research in educational communities with use of inquiry-based learning: theoretical framework and implications for teaching and learning in Sciences* discusses an interesting combination, this of action research with educational communities of learning, and its implications. He starts with the belief that educational action research focuses, among other things, to the empowerment of the teaching staff (the improvement of their individual competence) and the formation of groups (Professional Learning Communities – PLC), so that the group work of teachers is consistent with the improvement of their personal competence. For achieving these goals, this paper suggests a theoretical framework with three axes and analyzes their interaction. The first axis of the paper documents the attributes of a Professional Learning Community. The second axis indicates how a PLC could apply the action research methodology. The third axis proceeds by incorporating in action research methodology the Inquiry based Learning (IBL) model. The main research question to be investigated is how these three methodological axes in conjunction with each other could be at most beneficial for teachers and students delivering good learning outcomes.

At the end of the issue the reader can find a presentation of a new (recently published) book. This book is a collection of articles edited by George Bagakis in 2015 that concerns “*the methodology, the policies and practices of school-based teachers’ training and professional development*” (Athens: Grigoris).

**The Editors:**

Eleni Katsarou, Assistant Professor, University of Crete

Vassilis Tsafos, Assistant Professor, University of Athens.