

Participatory Action Research - Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers

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Episode 10 Host Patricia Maguire with Guest, Dr. Davydd Greenwood:
Action Research and Feminisms, Democratizing Higher Education
<https://www.parfemtrailblazers.net/episode-10-with-davydd-greenwood/>

[00:00:00] **Patricia:** Welcome to the Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers podcast. This is Episode 10 with esteemed action researcher Dr. Davydd Greenwood, and I'm your host, Patricia Maguire.

Our podcast explores the contributions of feminist trailblazers to participatory and action research, and by talking with trailblazers about their successes and struggles bringing feminist values and ways of being to participatory action research, we hope to encourage you to engage in participatory and action research that's deeply informed by intersectional feminisms, as well as connected to PAR's radical roots.

In today's episode, we're going to continue our turn to action research in higher ed with our guest, Dr. Davydd Greenwood, and let me tell you just a little bit about his career.

[00:01:04] Davydd is the Goldwin Smith Distinguished Professor Emeritus and Anthropology at Cornell University, where he taught for 44 years. And while he was there, he had many positions, including Director of the Einaudi Center for International Studies, Director of the Institute for European Studies, and he co-founded the Cornell Participatory Action Research Network, which we're going to talk about today.

He was named a Corresponding Member of the Spanish Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences and was president of the Association of International Education Administrators, and as an anthropologist, Davydd focuses on the anthropology of organizations with a special interest in the connection between action research and higher education reform. Davydd has engaged in action research for over 40 years, particularly in Spain, Norway, and New York, and he's worked on issues such as rural exodus, ethnic conflict, industrial cooperatives, participatory community development and the role of governmental institutions in shaping and exacerbating identity politics and conflicts. Davydd, welcome.

[00:02:19] **Davydd:** Thank you, Pat, and thanks very much for the invitation.

[00:02:22] **Patricia:** Well, I think we're going to have a robust conversation today. To get started, I'd like to give our listeners a flavor of your early work in action research, and in the 1980s, you did action research with people from the Mondragon cooperatives and the

Spanish Basque community. And the Mondragon cooperatives, as I understand it, were founded about 1955 and they united humanistic concepts of business and a philosophy of participation in solidarity. So how did your experience with the Mondragon cooperatives shape you as an action researcher?

[00:03:01] **Davydd:** Well, it was the beginning actually. I wasn't even aware of action research until I began that work, and I didn't begin it on my own. I had done field work in the Basque country in the late 1960s on rural exodus and farm commercialization and tourism.

And William Foote Whyte, the famous sociologist at Cornell in Industrial and Labor relations, was very interested in cooperatives, generally, in Latin America as well as elsewhere. But he noticed that nobody had written a good book, from his point of view, about Mondragon and wanted to do it, but he basically didn't know anything about the Basque country or Spain really. And he found out about me and invited me to help him with that project.

We got some money, ironically from the U.S. Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which was the ransom the U.S. was paying for the air bases in Spain, and we went off, he to write his book and me sort of tagging along. What then happened was when he was proposing to do this, he gave the Mondragon people, a few months before, a critique - things that he thought that they should attend to.

And when he finished, relatively young fellows stood up and said, "Thank you, Professor Whyte for your criticism. How are you going to help us?"

[00:04:22] And that was the beginning of this process. Bill, who was now relatively elderly and also had polio as a young man and was increasingly crippled as he got older, put me in the position of trying to help with no experience in industrial work, no experience in cooperatives, and no experience in action research. And so on the first day we showed up in a seminar room at the central offices, 20 people with a bunch of pads, papers and pencils, ready to hear whatever I had to say, which was [00:05:00] nothing.

Donald Schön said later, in hearing this story, that what I had done unintentionally was a T-group because they had committed and gotten permission to have all these people free for a month to work on a project and realized that I had no project.

[00:05:19] So I did the only thing I could think to do, which was to throw the ball back into their court and say, look, the world's leading experts on the cooperatives are here in this room. What is it exactly that you are worried about that would get you to spend this time together?

We had a few days of conversation and eventually it turned out that there was the theme. And the theme was that the cooperatives were growing very fast and they were recruiting new members at a lickety split sort of rate, but they felt there was, that their values as a cooperative were in danger because people were joining because it was a good job with good benefits. And so they were sure that the cooperatives were going to fail eventually because of this. So I said, “well, how do you know?” And so that began a process in which I was teaching them how to do research, both ethnography and interviews and focus groups, and encouraging them to ask the hard questions of as many people as possible.

[00:06:21] What I discovered, of course, was they all had access to all kinds of people and records and so on. So the kind of research that might have taken me 15 years, you know, took a week to get started because they could do things that no outsider could possibly do.

The end result was that they found out that nothing was the way they thought it was. That people were joining because it was a great job and good benefits. But as soon as they joined, they began to get committed to the idea of cooperation and participation and were actually quite angry with the management of the cooperatives for not living up to those values and their processes, for being very Tayloristic in their behavior. So they found out that they, in fact, were at the center of the problem.

[00:07:10] And to their credit, after getting this bad news over a two-year period of time, started designing new systems of HR management and so on, and we wrote a book together. None of them had ever written anything other than reports. And the book ended up becoming a manual for new members coming into the cooperatives. After that was all over with, Bill Whyte smiled at me and said, “well, now you've done action research.” And it was that I think was the first time I had ever heard the term.

[00:07:40] **Patricia:** It's amazing what happens when you create spaces for people to engage in dialogue and examine their own work situations, and you listen, and you learn with them. How do you think then that was your essentially baptism by fire, if you will, in action research and you're learning some of the beauties of it. How do you think that informed you then for your continued career as an action researcher?

[00:08:09] **Davydd:** It's complicated really, because, also narrating backwards is always cleaner than the way things really happened. But by then I was already Director of the Einaudi Center for International Studies. That center at that time had 24 programs with 24 faculty directors and I was supposed to coordinate it, but I didn't appoint practically any of the directors or have any control over their budget. And so directing it was a kind of interesting challenge. And what I was learning in Mondragon was, you know, they kept the books open, decision making was made publicly and so on. And in the Einaudi Center

people, the programs were fighting with each other all the time. I want more space. Don't give any money to that stupid program. You know, the usual academic bickering that we're all familiar with. And so I said, okay. I sat them all down, opened up the budget, and opened up the spatial distribution because space is gold in universities, and said, if you can figure out a better way to handle this, tell me.

And so I began participatory management because now I was so impressed with what they did in Mondragon [00:09:19] I thought, why aren't we behaving like this elsewhere, particularly when we have the freedom to do it and when somebody's not telling us you can't do it this way. The long and the short of it was that they became a, not only a solidarity group, but actually became quite troublesome to the administration because they started collectively making demands on the administration for more resources and more attention.

And so I began to see, you know, this works in more than just one context and then I started thinking about, you know, so why isn't the university run this way? And after that, I ended up focusing more and more of my attention on it.

Now, there were sidelights, there were lots of other things that happened in my wife's hometown in La Manche. [00:10:00] I did a, at her request, an action research search conference with the members of the two sides of the Civil War who still hated each other because they've never actually talked about what happened. And they still have interments on the roadside that haven't been dug up. And the idea was to see if there was a common ground. In that particular case, what we found out was that all of those people in that generation were losing their kids to the city and were going to end up in what is a fate worse than death in Spain which is -- alone in their homes without their children and grandchildren around. And so they found a common ground even though they hated each other and began to do some things together. So it was like rolling, uh, opportunities would come up and whatever the problem was, my answer was, let's do it collaboratively. It was that simple.

[00:10:58] **Patricia:** In my estimation I think you're the earliest, what I would call pro-feminist man in action and participatory research, and you've had an impact training generations of action researchers to make and grow the connection between feminisms and participatory action research. In 2000, and I'm going to quote you here, you argued, "action research owes a debt to feminist activists. Action research owes its recent resurgence to feminist movements" and I would call that street feminism. And then you went on to credit also academic feminists with opening the space in the academy that essentially kind of blew up positivism and then created space for action research as a

social reform activity based on democratic values. So tell us how you came to your position linking feminisms and participatory action research.

[00:11:58] **Davydd:** You deserve a lot of the credit because when you asked me to write the chapter for *Traveling Companions*, it was the first time I actually sat down to think about it. It had been a spontaneous interest before that, but I had not really thought through the connection. And so, and I notice now in rereading it that it was a lot of new thinking for me trying to figure out the answer to the question you just asked.

I think it's actually, in my case, a very complicated story, partially goes back to childhood, living in a community of Freudian psychiatrists who were authoritarian, patriarchal individuals who always knew better than you did what was good for you. But then I also married this Spanish woman who, you know, Pilar Fernández-Cañadas, who was the first woman from her town to ever get a PhD. Her parents made the amazing decision of educating their four daughters with university degrees, and she never looked back. And eventually, she got a job at Wells College, she first had a postdoc in what was then called Women's Studies at Cornell, [00:13:11] was very impressed with what she was learning there and it sort of gave a voice for her to things that she had lived through and was continuing to live through, obviously. And then she got a job at Wells College, which at that time was a women's college. And eventually ended up becoming the co-chair of what was then called the Women's Studies Program. So that was going on in the background.

I got interested in and joined the Women's Studies program at Cornell. In its early days, they allowed men to be in the program and ended up with two men on the board. And it was a very interesting period in that program because they had community members, students, and faculty and staff on the board. And even tenure and appointment votes were held by all with votes from all those people. It was quite interesting, and I was fascinated with what they were able to do. That was, of course, later shut down completely by the deans. And so these things were running around in the background all the time.

[00:14:18] Then of course, I noticed anthropology to begin with, my field, is a feminized discipline to begin with. It had many important women founders, but it also has been dominated by women practitioners. Not dominated politically, but dominated in terms of ethnographic productivity, perspectives, and so on. And so, I think anthropology from very early on, from Margaret Mead forward, had a feminist line running through it. There were a lot about *Growing Up in New Guinea*, *Coming of Age in Samoa* in Mead's work, *Male and Female*, which she wrote, I think in the 1950s. So that's all running around the back of my mind as something perfectly plausible.

But then I ran into your work. I began to notice that most of my classes were 80% or more women, and that clearly action research to women was an interesting proposition because it seemed to me that they were better at it than even the male students in the class. And I began to wonder, well, why is that?

And that's the time I found your book. And I came to the conclusion they were better at it because they got a lot of practice trying to work their way around, collaboratively, work their way around patriarchal institutions, and it appealed to them because it could be scientific and meaningful, but at the same time not offend their sense of, of what the right way to, to be social is.

And so after that, it just seemed like a no-brainer to me to continue down that line, and because of my wife as well, I got to hear lectures by people like Judith Butler and so on and read things that she was reading. [00:16:03] So it's just been a theme. I mean, there's an ideological and a scientific justification, which is if you exclude half the population from your project, then you're just exactly half as smart as you should be. And so, you know, what kind of sense does it make, in a discipline, an activity, that is supposed to be collaborative and take advantage of what everybody knows to exclude people on the grounds of gender. That's insane.

[00:16:34] **Patricia:** Let's keep going on this theme for a while. In action research and participatory research, critical reflexivity means that researchers are expected to examine the impact of their own multiple identities on their work. And it doesn't seem to me that men, cis men, in PAR are really expected to acknowledge, let alone examine the impact of how they do masculinity on their action research.

I'm a reader of reference lists. I often joked with my students that I read a book from the back to the front - that I'd go and I'd read the reference list of a book or the articles first. And if you read the bibliographies of much male-authored action research studies, very few of it seems to me informed by feminist theories and values.

So, in your opinion, in the action research and the PAR world, why does the work of so few men seem to examine either the impact of their masculinity on their work and seem so little informed by any version of feminisms? How do you account for that?

[00:17:44] **Davydd:** I think your observation is right. I mean, there are a few exceptions. There are people like Bill Torbert who is almost embarrassingly frank about his masculinity. But there are very few people who take those kinds of risks and survive at least in any kind of academic setting. There aren't any rewards for taking this line, I think. So long as these people are either anchored in structured organizations or in universities, unreflective kind of male behavior is the dominant form of behavior and everything else is everything else.

[00:18:19] And so there's very little pressure for reflexivity or for sincere reflexivity. There are a lot of people who will talk a kind of feminist inclusive line and so on, and then you see what they do. And they do something entirely different. I think it's been very different. There are some exceptions. Eric Trist was an interesting exception because Eric Trist was, who I only met once, was sort of softer in his whole approach to things, more inclusive in a serious way. I think Robert Flood is also in this line and has done a lot of collaborative work with women and talks a great deal about power and patriarchy and so on. But generally speaking, particularly the men who are rooted in academia, there's absolutely no incentive to do what you just asked for.

[00:19:10] **Patricia:** You know, I would say early on it wasn't a career builder for women either, you know?

Davydd: No

[00:19:16] **Patricia:** I mean, in, in terms of participatory action research, or action research. Whether it was from a feminist perspective or not, wasn't a real career builder for women. You know, there was a lot of pressure to be, I don't know, I guess I would say honorary men.

[00:19:31] **Davydd:** I think you're absolutely right. I mean, just thinking about some of the people that you know, my impression of Susan Boser, and Mónica Ruiz-Casares and Laurie Vasily. I ended up serving as a minor member in the Cornell system with the PhD committees of those people - there must have been 30 or 40 action research PhDs where I was the minor member from outside their discipline. And what it seemed to do was to give them permission to do something that otherwise in their home discipline they weren't encouraged to do and then help them defend it. So I think you're right. I don't think it was smooth sledding for them. There was a decision point in every one of their careers as to whether they were going to take this risk or not, or whether they would continue with formal theory and, you know, grounded theory and whatever else happened to be the thing they were working on. And that was the network that we're going to talk about came in, creating a kind of environment that mutual encouragement to do that, but it was risky.

[00:20:35] **Patricia:** Let's talk about that. Let's, let's shift over to talking about the CPARN network. And to kind of tee it up, you have a longtime relationship with your research partner, Morten Levin, and together you've written and spoken out extensively about the urgent need to essentially to transform public universities into democratic learning communities. And you've said that public universities are supposed to be devoted to knowledge creation, critical reflection, and training the next group of scholars. And yet, public universities are often very disconnected from the communities they're supposed to serve. And that action research, in your estimation, is sort of an antidote to that

disconnection, which I think brings us to the Cornell Participatory Action Research Network, CPARN, that operated for 20 years from 1992 to 2012.

Tell us what made the Cornell Participatory Action Research Network so unique and trailblazing in the struggle to both democratize research and try to reform the university starting with Cornell.

[00:21:50] **Davydd:** First of all, there wasn't any plan. This happened, it didn't get planned. And my impression on reflection is what happened was that it was the graduate students who brought us together. The graduate students at Cornell, graduate students have a chair from the field in which they're doing their PhD or Masters, and they have minor members from either within that field or outside. If they can get their chair to agree they can have people from anywhere in the university. And so the students started picking certain faculty members, John Forester in City and Regional Planning, me, David Pelletier in Nutrition, and a number of other people who they felt were compatible with their goals for doing some kind of engaged research.

In the process of doing that in these committee meetings and going to the defenses and so on, the faculty met each other. [00:22:49] So the students actually brought like-minded faculty from all over the universities. And you know, how silos work in universities, otherwise it's pretty unlikely that any of us would've really met. We got together and began to say, well, this is kind of interesting.

First of all, it was supportive for us, but it was also a place where the students could develop themselves to create a forum and have discussions, help each other with their PhD projects, share information and all the rest of us. And the driving force was always the students, and we were just sort of the ones holding the roof up while the students did their activism. And so it sustained, as long as the students were really motivated to sustain it. It also didn't cost any money. That was another thing. It didn't require space, didn't cost any money, and so the university at that point didn't care.

[00:23:43] **Patricia:** One of the things that made CPARN so unique and dynamic was the shared leadership of students, staff, and faculty, and in fact, one group organized something called FEM PAR - Feminisms and PAR. And I'm reading off an old website that they actually created, and it says the goal was "to create a learning environment for restructuring the relationships of feminism and PAR."

[00:24:11] And so there were people like yourself, Dr. Nimat Barazangi, Mónica Ruiz-Casares, Ann Martin, Mary Jo Dudley, Laurie Vasily. Carla Shafer, who I'm sure did probably the website part of it. So Davydd, tell us some about FEM PAR.

[00:24:32] **Davydd:** FEM PAR certainly wasn't my doing, although I had a connection to all of those people. But Nimat Hafez Barazangi had a position as a visiting fellow at the Women's Studies program. She was a, and is a very interesting person who had focused, I mean, she was basically a radical Islamic Syrian activist who was very determined to bring women's [00:25:00] voices into this for reasons, I think, beyond just action research, but also because of her experience as a Muslim woman. She was the one who really put this in motion. [00:25:12] She took the initiative, she organized the group and collaborated with Carla to develop the website, but she kept pushing it forward and she organized seminars. She urged us to invite people. So I think we ended up working for Nimat, was the way, was the way it happened.

And of course, because the action research group of graduate students was probably 80% women, there was a lot of sympathy for that, a lot of interest in what she was doing. And she continued to do that work for years and years and years. Not just through PAR FEM, but also through teaching activities in Syria when that was still possible. And writing - she's written quite a bit on women's roles, gender roles, and so on. She's still working hard and published, uh, at least two or three books in the interim after, even after CPARN disappeared.

[00:26:10] **Patricia:** How do you think that group, the FEM PAR or PAR FEM, how do you think that influenced the broader CPARN network?

[00:26:18] **Davydd:** I think, I don't think it was so much an influence, it was an embodiment of that network. I mean, that network was really dominated by women in terms of numbers and agendas, styles of cooperation and collaboration and so on, and aims and goals. And so it seems to me that CPARN really was primarily a feminist group. It was much less attention to some of the things that, that I spent time on, for example, industrial work. There were very few people in that whole group interested in that. Not too many people were interested in John Forester's "deliberative practice" in action research. But basically, I think these women were the motor of the program. Pat, if you don't mind, we might want to talk about how it fell apart.

[00:27:10] **Patricia:** Let's do. Talk about how it fell apart.

[00:27:12] **Davydd:** The university was in still a fairly plush phase where you could do things like this and play around and so on. This was before the neoliberal accountability audit culture system came into play that drove people back into their disciplinary silos and punished them for stepping outside. That was part of it. But also CPARN imploded eventually because there started to be ideological conflicts among the students in particular, about which was the right way to do action research. And so the fractures inside

of the action research community, if you want to call it a community, a disunity maybe, showed up on the campus and people started censoring one another's views and it just broke, immediately evaporated!

[00:28:07] **Patricia:** And that seems so, you know, antithetical to some of the underlining, underpinning values of action research.

[00:28:15] **Davydd:** That's right. So I think was part of this sea change toward the neoliberal university.

[00:28:20] **Patricia:** You've mentioned frequently, mostly in end notes or footnotes, that you shifted to the term action research instead of using the term PAR.

Davydd: Mm-hmm.

[00:28:30] **Patricia:** Because you had perhaps been alerted by colleagues of dangers of action researchers from the global North appropriating the term PAR.

[00:28:40] **Davydd:** Well, it was actually a more specific matter than that Orlando Fals Borda came to Cornell to invite Bill Whyte and me to the Convergence Conference where we all met. And he told Whyte, he says, "I am here to offer you a treaty. And the treaty is, stop using the term participatory action research. That's our term." And so that was the first thing.

And then the second thing was that Morten Levin said to me, if it's not participatory, it's not action research, so why are you doubling up the terminology? And that at that point I decided, look, let's not piss people off. And at the same time, let's be more intellectually consistent. And so it actually was a direct challenge that alerted me to the fact that the term had another meaning that I wasn't aware of.

[00:29:33] **Patricia:** It's interesting because I don't think I've particularly ever heard that story. I knew there was tension somehow. And a lot of subsequent effort to keep PAR sort of connected to the global south.

So let's talk some about the book you wrote with Morten Levin, *The Introduction to Action Research*, and I love the subtitle *Social Research for Social Change*, and I might add that in that 1998 edition, you already at that point had a contemporary feminist analysis section. So now you're co-writing the third edition of the *Introduction to Action Research*. And you've said about this third edition that it's really emerging as a kind of a whole new book because you're orienting action research around human survival and planetary ecology. So tell us about the book and how you and your co-authors are weaving intersectional feminisms?

[00:30:33] **Davydd:** Well, I think that the first thing is that I realized that the second edition sounded old fashioned to me, and there was a lot of interesting stuff that had happened since it was published. I went back to SAGE and asked them about it, and they said, “Yeah, who cares? You know, it's selling under 500 copies a year. That's not a business proposition for us, so we'll keep it in print until we sell out what we've got, and you can have the rights.” At the same time Morten Levin got quite ill and is now unable to collaborate. ** see end note

I began to think maybe this is the time for a generational transition. I'm 80 years old for God's sake. So I've recruited two younger people, one of them, a former student of Morten's and mine, and another one who I had met actually at Bangor University, who is a Dutch political scientist who teaches at Birmingham now, who does deliberative policy analysis, which is the political science version of action research. [00:31:37] And so I proposed to them that we write the book together, we write a third edition together.

The process of negotiating the subject matter, as you might expect, you bring two new brains into the picture, something happens. And it turns out that particularly Koen Bartels, who's the Dutch author, was obsessed with the question of sustainability. He's pretty clear that the world's going to come to an end if we don't change things, and that the only reason to proceed with action research is to try to solve the sustainability question. And as we talked it through, of course, the sustainability question is a lot broader than just ecological sustainability. [00:32:21] It's about inequality, it's about gender discrimination, it's about racism. All these arrangements that simply don't sustain, that require constant authoritarianism to hold them in place and that are producing the outcome, that ultimately we have an unsustainable world. As we began to read into this, we found a lot of literature that convinced us that sustainability is really the only question, that it's the litmus test for everything else that gets done. And we also, of course, concluded that action research is the only way to get there. So it's a very different take. I mean, it's a complete change of perspective for me from a book that was saying, here are the different varieties of action research, take your pick, to saying here's here is the future of humanity and action research is the only way forward. So even the old boys can learn new tricks, I guess.

[00:33:16] **Patricia:** let's link that up to your long-term work promoting action research as a way to essentially reform public higher ed. And we've talked about that some, but what then do you see as sort of the future of action research as one tool, if you will, to recreate, re-democratize, change public higher education.

[00:33:42] **Davydd:** Well, I came to the conclusion that the public university needs to be recreated very slowly. I mean, after all, Cornell University is a land grant university in the state of New York, and so it has a public service mission requirement. And so I was quite

comfortable with that idea until I realized it wasn't happening. That the kind of paternalistic extension systems that we mostly have, that's not true of every extension person, but it's true in general of the way these programs are structured, it wasn't getting there. Then it also came back to the fact that there isn't any world problem that isn't a multidisciplinary problem. They're dynamic, complicated, multifaceted messes and universities are organized in these neat little boxes. And if you step outside the line, somebody slams you down. That's no way to solve any kind of problems.

[00:34:42] So I began to slowly think, well, interdisciplinary programs must be the way to go. And I spent 27 years of my career in one or another interdisciplinary programs. Basically they've all either disappeared or been domesticated without an exception. They made no difference to the way...the structure is actually worse now than it was then. Women's Studies is a very interesting example, because Women's Studies, which was this university-wide program in the early days was turned into an academic department. And all the outsiders were excluded. The same thing happened with Science and Technology Studies, which I participated in. It was turned into a department. The then dean said, I use these mechanism to keep as a kind of parking lot for troublesome people. So I began to realize, look, as long as the Tayloristic structure of higher education is in place, none of these things is going to work. And so 27 years of effort was for naught, other than the learning that you're not going to win going that direction.

[00:35:51] Now I see the universities, you know, on the verge of falling off of a cliff. Tenure is gone mostly. Precarity dominates. The connections with the outside are so troubled that we've got states now that are preventing or controlling academic speech from the governor's office.

[00:36:08] **Patricia:** I'm in that state. I'm in Florida.

Davydd: Oh, really?

[00:36:11] **Patricia:** And there's a bill in the Florida legislature right now that would essentially dismantle all majors or minors that are intersectional, have anything to do with gender equity, or what they call critical race theory, although they have no idea what critical race theory is. But it would dismantle those majors and minors, which essentially means you'd have no coursework in those areas.

[00:36:39] **Davydd:** I've been following DeSantis very closely ever since he appeared on the scene, and it's contagious. It's going across the country in various states. It's an all-out attack on academic speech. White supremacy... I mean, it'll be very interesting to see what happens next because, you know, I can't imagine being a parent with kids heading for a university sending my kids to that university.

[00:37:04] **Patricia:** Well, and that brings us to I think the future of action research, if you will, because really so many action researchers and participatory action researchers get their first training in university. There are some NGOs and institutes that are doing that training. So I often, at the end of a podcast, ask the guest, you know, what would you say to emerging scholars or action researchers, beginning action researchers. But instead, I want to ask you, what would you say to faculty members in universities across the world? What would you say to them as they're still trying to teach and promote action research that is connected to its radical roots and not technicalized, if you will. What's your advice to them?

[00:37:53] **Davydd:** That's a tough one. I'm quite ambivalent on the subject. I mean, I see very little hope for reform in the current university system. If anything, we're going the opposite direction, but at the same time, we're going to fall off of a cliff, financially. I mean, student debt is intolerable. And excluding foreign students is intolerable. The American demographic cliff is clearly in sight and we're going to have an awful lot of institutions that are just going to fail unless they change in very fundamental ways and build up a constituency of some kind.

[00:38:28] So it's kind of an odd sort of hope, but being prepared for the cataclysm with an alternative, it seems to me to be really important. That means that action research can't just spend their time criticizing the university, which is something that Morten and I did for at least 20 years, but coming up with alternative designs for the way universities could be organized that would meet these goals and attract students and community support. Because they're not, and so then what you start doing is, what I've been doing is, looking at the few exceptional universities or colleges that do this.

[00:39:07] Some liberal arts colleges do this extremely well. Like Berea College, for example, a pre-Civil War college that was integrated; and no student pays anything for going there. It's entirely supported by philanthropy. It's run as an interdisciplinary work and study institution. So there's some lessons to be learned for the way that works. Some religious institutions. I did an action research search conference for Goshen College. And Goshen College has a similar kind of set of features where the disciplines are less important than the mission. In this case, it's not really an evangelical mission. It's a Christian mission, but compatible with action research values.

And then there's the Mondragon University, which is an 8,500 student, five campus university that's [00:40:00] run as a worker's cooperative. And one of the magic features of that university is that the central administration consists of three people and their secretaries. And all the rest of the administrative and maintenance work and so on is done collaboratively across the entire institution.

So there's some models out there that work, and Susan Wright and I, Susan is an anthropologist at the University of Aarhus, in Denmark and runs something called Centre for Higher Education Futures, and we've spent a long time on alternative structures, trust models, non-revocable trust models where nobody owns and nobody can sell off the university, but they're responsible for running it.

[00:40:46] So I think action researchers need to spend time on futuristics at this point. And that's what we tried to do at the end of the last book that Morten and I did, we wrote up, models for the way a university could be organized that would achieve these kinds of goals.

But an interesting problem is you need expertise, but you don't necessarily need disciplinary departments. As soon as you've got a disciplinary department, you have a patriarchal Tayloristic system. On the other hand, how do you train people to have expertise? Well, I think action research hasn't asked you that, which is that you don't separate them from the community and work world while they're studying, but you make that the subject of their study and they acquire whatever expertise they need in the process. [00:41:37] And I'm quite aware that this is coy and hardly an answer to the question, but I think we have to be involved in futuristics and be ready for the crisis.

[00:41:48] **Patricia:** I think to sort of wrap things up, as you were preparing for today, thinking about the connections over time in your own career and in the field between action research and feminism's, intersectional feminisms, what else would you like to say that either I didn't ask about or we didn't get to?

[00:42:08] **Davydd:** Well, I think this is something that shows up in your book very clearly, which is that my background as an ethnographer, has really been critical to this whole process. Because ethnography, if you are trained well, and I was lucky, I had a couple of people who really did train me to do it, is looking for surprises, looking for things that you don't expect, listening for things that you, you aren't sure you heard right. That kind of ethnographic curiosity seems to me to be absolutely essential. It's essential to intersectional feminism, but it's essential to a lot of other things. It's listening to a lathe operator about why the lathe shouldn't be set up the way it's set up. It's a listening process.

That's why I've always been so excited by [00:43:00] the work of Mary Belenky and her colleagues, because that listening project of theirs, that was an act of genius to listen hard enough that the stories would eventually surface. And from the stories that surfaced, networks began to build.

So I think that this discipline of ethnography, which is not an anthropological monopoly, is absolutely, it's essential to feminism, it's essential to, to almost any field of inquiry. Turns out to be essential, as I learned from my students in engineering and other places as well.

Learning to listen to the users of a building about how the building works or doesn't work for them, or how to avoid buildings falling down in an earthquake by looking at vernacular architecture, I mean, ethnography is always there, curiosity, openness, and it's a constant discipline because we tend not to be open.

[00:43:52] **Patricia:** Well, and I think that circles back to what you were saying that you learned in the 1980s with your initial work with the cooperative members was a listening process. And listening to their experience, creating space where they could listen to each other and use that listening and dialogue and talking to come up with their own solutions.

[00:44:15] **Davydd:** That's actually very interesting. You used the terms creating space and you used it before. My colleague, José Luis González, who was the co-author of those books, and co-conspirator in this project described what had happened as “creating a new space in the organization”. So even the metaphors fits for the stakeholders as well.

[00:44:37] **Patricia:** I found sort of early on when I was training teacher action researchers, because I shifted from PAR really to teacher action research because that's who I was working with, that I wasn't spending enough time training people in what, and I came out of a counseling background, for me were basic listening skills. And I kind of assumed people had them, but they don't. And so a lot of times action researchers don't know how to set up or they struggle to set up processes that facilitate people's dialogue. People talking with each other, dialoguing with each other. And it's sort of this skill set, that active listening, that would have to take or I had to take more time in helping action researchers learn that skill and practice it.

[00:45:31] **Davydd:** Many, many years ago, there was an Australian agricultural economist who sat in on my action research seminar. Very early in the, those seminars, and he was very direct and afterwards he came up to me and he says, “You know, Greenwood, next time you ask a question, shut up and wait, and wait until everybody's uncomfortable, including you and don't give in.” So I tried it, and by God, changed the dynamic of the class completely.

[00:46:03] **Patricia:** Well, and again, I think that's part of the action research ethos of being willing to listen, being able to reflect critically, to take in feedback and, and change your practice over time based on what comes in, even when it's uncomfortable.

[00:46:18] **Davydd:** I think the one thing we haven't talked about in that context though, is that it's really important to provide some kind of safety around that process because the initial reactions every time we've started, any of these projects that I've been involved in was fearfulness. That until it was clear that there was a kind of safe umbrella around which things would not leave the room until they'd had a chance to really sort them through and

think them out. I think we also underestimate the degree to which people require some kind of safety in order to be able to speak at all.

[00:46:54] **Patricia:** Yeah, that's really critical because people, myself included, we do self-censorship, you know, when we're fearful, we don't know where the information's going, don't know how it's going to be used, how it might be used against us, or what an organization wants to do. There's a lot of self-censorship.

[00:47:12] **Davydd:** Well, even among students, it turns out there was a survey that was published a couple of days ago, 60% of the, of a big sample of undergraduate students say they self-censor every day to avoid getting beaten down by somebody.

[00:47:26] **Patricia:** Part of what we're trying to do here is talking with trailblazers in action research like yourself, is to keep alive, amplify, the stories, if you will, of the successes and the struggles of action research over time so that newer generations of action researchers can be uplifted and inspired by the long-term work that people like yourself are doing.

[00:47:51] **Davydd:** Well we haven't talked about it, but doing action research, the collegial process of doing it with people is the most rewarding thing I've ever dealt with in my life. It's addicting. I mean, I can't imagine working with a group of people any other way because it's satisfying personally. It's not just a struggle and let's be serious and all that. It's also a way of being human that, if you can convey that to people, it's simply a better way to live your life.

[00:48:24] **Patricia:** There's a good note to end on.

So, I want to thank you for sharing a small part of your life's work in action research with our listeners today. And I want to thank our listeners for tuning in. Please help us expand our listenership by sharing the link to this episode with your colleagues and networks. Give us a shout out on social media.

A transcript of today's podcast and additional information about Davydd Greenwood's work will be posted on our companion website <https://www.parfemtrailblazers.net/> So if you've missed earlier podcasts, you'll find them there.

So that's it folks for Episode 10 of Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers. And now as John Lewis urged, go make some good trouble of your own.

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** Note (00:30:33). This episode was recorded March 27, 2023. After a long illness, Professor Morten Levin passed away April 9, 2023. Dr. Levin was a Norwegian sociologist and Professor of Organization and Work Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).