

Morten Levin, July 11, 1946—April 9, 2023

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This obituary will also be published in the European Journal of Workplace Innovation (EJWI).

In this text we pay our respects, both professionally and personally, to Morten Levin who passed away on April 9th 2023 at 76 years of age. We who write this knew Morten from different periods, professional, and geographical distances. Our common ground is our mutual interest in action research and work life research and change, concerns that occupied Morten for decades. We know that Morten's life contained other dimensions, for others to narrate. We knew him as a leader, educator, professor, and friend in Trondheim attached to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU, previously NTH), the SINTEF research foundation, Cornell University, and various national programs such as ACRES and EDWOR. Underlying our professional commonality with Morten are significant overlaps in political concern with democratic institutions generally and with securing and developing workplace democracy as a central feature in Norway and other countries, founded upon the Norwegian "Industrial Democracy project" of the mid-1960s. We who write this are: Roger Klev, Davydd Greenwood, Ann Martin, Johan Ravn, and Olav Eikeland, all engaged, as Morten was, in practices related to work life, action research, and relevant educational and extension

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Citation: Eikeland, O., Greenwood, D. J., Klev, R., Martin, A. W. & Ravn, J. E. (2023). Morten Levin, July 11, 1946 – April 9, 2023. *Forskning og Forandring*, 6(1), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.23865/fof.v6.5889>

programs at master and PhD level. These are the threads that brought us into Morten's orbit.

We each have stories to tell that illuminate Morten's life and contributions, and this shapes the narrative of our tribute. Following a summary of his career, we offer our separate accounts of Morten's gifts to us and his extraordinary professional accomplishments.

Early career

Morten was educated first as an engineer, but after working as a researcher in engineering he turned to sociology. It was during this transition, at the beginning of the 1980s, that our common history starts.

Morten's early personal and professional journey before that was of course important to his becoming the man who we met and worked with. He had worked at a process plant in his hometown, studied first engineering and then operations research at NTH, did his diploma work at the Hydro Karmøy Plant and worked at FFI (in defense technology research) after graduation. This background gave him a deeper understanding of industry, technology and change than many of his contemporary social scientists. In addition, his strong engagement in social justice, power and politics may have started early. Not only was he part of a generation where political engagement was stronger than today among students and intellectuals, his background was also important. His Jewish father, who barely survived a German prison camp in Oslo, came home to be rejected by the local Jewish community because he was married to a non-Jewish woman. Injustice was ingrained in the family history and may have strengthened his engagement in social development and in understanding how processes of power and politics play out in any social system.

Morten's ability to engage with very different issues and questions made him both a widely respected scholar and a popular teacher and supervisor. He is remembered at NTNU for his interdisciplinary research projects with colleagues and PhD candidates. Morten guided close to 50 PhD candidates through successful defense, and through this he contributed to an enormous amount of research done by others and to the shape of many professional careers.

Roger Klev

One of my first experiences with Morten was when he gave a course in public governance and planning to a small group of mostly engineering students. I was one of the students, and while most courses from this period are long forgotten – they took place more than 35 years ago – I still remember the discussions from this particular class: discussions about theories and models and their relevance to democracy, how ideas, structures and political processes could change or reproduce social conditions, and so on. It was not only important and interesting to me, it was a way of teaching that became a gold standard, in my view, and it was an example of university teaching

(or learning) at its very best. It is a practice that is losing ground, unfortunately. Today, every course must have clearly stated “learning objectives” upfront. In Morten’s teaching, the “learning objectives” emerged from intense early discussions with students about why and how the course could become meaningful.

Morten became my teacher, mentor, colleague and friend, both through discussions and as a role model. He influenced who I became and how I worked. I take this opportunity to share with you some of the work Morten did at the university, often paving the way for something new. Morten not only researched change and development, he was himself a practitioner of the art of creating change, mainly through initiating and organizing new research and education.

Morten had an exceptionally wide network which included researchers nationally and internationally, and top management in large industrial companies, industrial associations, various funding sources, and trade unions and employers’ federations. The different actors who wanted to contribute to the development of education, research and working life knew Morten and knew that if he took the lead on something, it would be implemented.

Morten discussed challenges and created ideas with key people, formulated concrete solutions, got them funded, and established broad-based teams of colleagues from different disciplines and institutions to realize ideas together. This was also how he worked when he, together with Max Elden in 1989, created the first action research-oriented doctoral program at The University of Trondheim. This was the SUM program, the “group” or “cohort” of PhD students that Ann and Davydd refer to in their texts. This was a time when the idea of programs in the field of doctoral education was not yet established, at least not in Norway.

Later, in the early 90s, Morten led the design and piloting of a new and ambitious executive master’s program in “Technology Management.” “Technology Management,” a poorly defined term, was part concept and partly just a phrase hinting at the need for an alternative to current MBA programs. In the 80s, top executives of large Norwegian companies had degrees in business or finance; the dominant idea was that management was a professional field primarily about the analysis of economic results, the definition of markets, and the pursuit of financial success. The understanding of production, operations and technology development was for lower-level managers. By the 90s, this perception had begun to change. An executive program in “Technology Management” at the MIT Sloan School was either an influence or an example of this change in emphasis. NTH (Norwegian Institute of Technology) in Trondheim, the leading institution in technological research and education, and NHH (Norwegian School of Economics) in Bergen, with a similar leading status in business economics, had not cooperated before this time.

With this as a background, Morten took on the task of building a top management program in Technology Management as a collaboration between these two institutions. He asked me to assist him in this work, and thus began an intense learning

experience. We travelled between the Norwegian institutions and arranged seminars and workshops with potential lecturers. We also travelled to MIT, Purdue and Texas A&M, inviting cooperation. Morten enrolled a team of experienced professors from a wide range of disciplines, set high academic and operational ambitions and ran the design project with an energy and drive that is highly unusual in academic institutional collaboration. And he succeeded. He established a successful collaboration between these two very different institutions and with the three US universities as partners. Only a few years earlier, no one had heard of technology management. Today, a “Master’s in Technology Management” has become a regular offering of NTH (now NTNU) and NHH.

In parallel with this work, Morten took it upon himself to develop another large initiative; to establish a cross-disciplinary PhD program in operations and production in the process industry. One year after the idea was initiated, he invited me into the program as coordinator. The program was named “INPRO – Integrated Production Systems for the Process Industry.” Again, Morten used his ability to understand industrial and societal challenges, formulate ideas in collaboration with actors from many different sectors, and then organize and lead the implementation of an initiative in line with these ideas. The INPRO program funded nine doctoral fellowships; two in engineering cybernetics, two in chemical engineering, and five in organization and management. These PhD candidates and their supervisors worked closely together to develop a better understanding of operations in processing plants while also pursuing individual PhD projects. The program included as partners nine of the largest process industry companies in Norway, as well as the Federation of Norwegian Process and Manufacturing Industries (PIL) and the Norwegian Oil Industry Association (OLF). All companies and organizations participated as partners in the doctoral candidates’ research and in the academic discussions within the program.

Another way in which Morten’s work had great practical impact was in how he transferred ideas and the model of participative action research to organizational development and change management. Today, the concept of co-generative learning, or co-creation, is a widely used idea in development processes, especially in the public sector. Morten might not approve of the practical use of these concepts and models today, but he did know very well that “the fate of an argument is in the hand of its later users.” As the faculty member responsible for a course in Organizational Development (later Change Management) at NTH in mid the 90s, Morten experienced how mainstream textbooks on organizational development and change barely reflected Norwegian working life and its ideas and values about democracy and participation. Morten decided, and I was very glad to do this work together with him, to develop a textbook that reflected this thinking. The co-generative learning model from PAR we espoused became the core model for leading participatory change and development, a model that has gained considerable influence in parts of Norwegian working life in recent years, especially in the extensive development work in schools

and other parts of the public sector. This textbook has been revised twice. I get a lot of feedback and requests, and I get to know a lot of new people because of this book. I am reminded every time of Morten and of what I learned from working together with him.

Davydd Greenwood

I don't remember when Morten and I first met. I know we both attended the Thorsrud Memorial Conference, but I don't think we met then. So it was probably at Cornell in relation to Programs for Employment and Workplace Systems in Industrial and Labor Relations Extension.

My first real contact with Morten as a mentor was with the PhD students at NTNU in Johan Ravn's cohort. It was a first for me in many ways. It was the first time I had seen a "cohort" PhD program and the first time I had ever seen a group of PhD students actually functioning as a learning community. I was intrigued and fascinated by the process, the dynamics, and the combination of sociability and learning, and, of course, the quality of the students.

Apparently, Morten found my participation worthwhile, and he began engaging me in other projects. Soon thereafter I found myself being mentored by Morten. I was just beginning to teach an Action Research (AR) seminar in those days and was reading voraciously. I had also participated in a couple of search conferences. In 1994 my wife had proposed to the socialist mayor of the town she is from in Spain and where we live in La Mancha that I do something of the sort of work action researchers do to help her town. The town is almost equally divided between the two political factions that fought out the Spanish Civil War and have never reconciled their differences over the violence they perpetrated on each other. At the same time, the town of 8,000 was losing population and provided poor opportunities for young people to develop a meaningful career or profession. With no one to help me, I decided to do a search conference convening representatives from both sides around the question of the future of their children, many of whom would leave them alone in the town if they moved away. To deal with being on my own, I decided to give a short course in AR to a group of secondary school teachers who I would ask to help me coordinate the process.

The main issue was how to structure and plan such a conference. At that point, Morten weighed in and worked tirelessly with me on the schedule, formats, and ideas for structuring the activity. I know from personal experience why his students so admired his mentoring. The results, by the way, were amazing. A set of working groups were created, a number of people became participatory community leaders, and there was great momentum until the Conservative Party won local elections 3 years later, canceled the project that very day, and even destroyed the archives of the project itself.

Since Morten was a frequent visitor to Cornell, I arranged to have him participate in the action research course I had begun to teach, something he did to very good effect. He also gave feedback to students when they presented him with the ways they had

decided to structure that action research learning community. I particularly remember that when a student group presented a very idealistic democratic view of the process and aims, Morten told them that they sounded like a “bunch of social democrats.” The students didn’t get the joke but it set me to recognizing that AR and social democracy are linked in a way I had only partially perceived.

After this, Morten and I found our working relationship was so agile and compatible that we began working on a variety of papers together, punctuated by my increasing participation at his bidding in a variety of national industrial democracy initiatives and a number of international conference presentations. From that point forward, we were in almost constant contact in a collaboration broken only by his illness. We found ourselves invited to be staff members of the Scandinavian Action Research Project (ACRES) aimed at promoting the conversion of AR projects into publishable writing. The staff was headed by Hans van Beinum and included Claude Faucheaux, René van der Vlist, Morten, and me. As staff members, Morten and I managed to reproduce the ideological split within the staff between a paternal-therapeutic view of Action Research and a participatory learning community view. Staff relations were rocky throughout but the work with the participants was not just rewarding but taught me enough about the action research writing problem that I was able to edit a book on the dilemmas of “writing action research” with the very staff members with whom we had battled.

With help from William Foote Whyte and Ira Harkavy (head of the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania), we organized a two-day meeting on action research at Penn which included Björn Gustavsen, Donald Schön, Budd Hall, John Gaventa, Peter Reason, Dan Bar-On, Ann Martin, Peter Lazes, and some others I have forgotten. Don Schön facilitated the meeting and once again, splits between Southern PAR (Participatory Action Research), industrial democracy, and Action Science loomed large in the process. All of this kept bouncing around in Morten’s and my heads.

When Orlando Fals Borda invited Bill Whyte and me to the Convergence Conference in Colombia, I conspired with Morten to bring both some of the Cornell AR students and some of his PhD students to present our approaches to AR. This was an intriguing learning experience for Morten and for I because the yawning ideological gap between so-called “Southern PAR” and industrial democracy work became apparent, as did the damage this does to AR in general.

Around this time, Morten proposed we write an introductory book on AR. The intense and regular dialogues we had as we figured out how to organize, thematize and select topics deepened our collaboration a great deal and ultimately consolidated our ability to both work and write together. In a way, the book summarized our view of AR as the only “real” social science, the importance of varieties of ideologies and practices in AR, and the need to structure the book so that it would leave open the choice of approaches to the readers.

By then, Morten had managed to put together the EDWOR (doctoral) programs and asked me to form part of the staff. I was delighted since I could teach about and learn about work that was basically of little interest to my colleagues at Cornell University. The real champions of AR at Cornell were the students, not the faculty.

Over this long period, Morten and I both increasingly found ourselves fettered by the organizational structures and practices of the “non-learning organizations” called universities. We both saw that what we were teaching and practicing depended on a transdisciplinary, action-oriented, and ethically motivated set of practices that university organization undermines at every turn. As a result, the latter years of our collaborative writing focused on a critique of university structures and practices. In this regard, Morten and I evolved together through reflection on our teaching, research, and learning experiences.

I had managed to get a Ford Foundation Grant centering on what we described as the crisis of relevance and engagement of the social sciences. Over the years of the project, we managed together to create a group of some 20 professors from different countries and disciplines to focus on the issues of the domestication of the social sciences into spectator speculation in universities and thinktanks. Morten co-organized these processes and we held meetings in Norway, Spain, and California; many of the ongoing relationships created there have endured.

With Morten it was not all work and no play. Long night walks, trips to Denmark, Sweden, Colombia, and touring in Mexico were a combination of learning, talking, and having fun seeing new things together. The intensity of Morten’s curiosity about practically everything made every outing a joy.

Something else I learned from Morten was about what it is to have an “engineer’s head.” I have no particular technological background though I do like IT and tech “toys” and have gradually become able to more or less manage them. But from the very beginning of our relationship, whether it be talking about the weather, the sails on a boat, or a thermostat, I noticed that Morten always saw the world differently from me. He would immediately talk about how the weather systems work, how the wind worked in the sails, what makes a thermostat function, etc. This was radically different from talking to my anthropology and other social science colleagues at Cornell for whom the causal and mechanical structures of things were an uninteresting mystery. From there, the step for me into socio-technical systems design was actually a short one and working at that intersection became central to me in a way it had not been previously. I also learned to see his cohorts of graduate students as importantly different from many of mine because they generally had a first degree in engineering while most of mine did not. The argument for the socio-technical linkage really made itself when they were able to deal with both the technical and social questions and not just the social ones as so many social researchers do.

Morten was an avid consumer of political news, a sarcastic commentator on the foibles of politicians, a tough critic, and occasionally completely irascible. But what I

most liked was that he was as demanding of himself as of others. That, combined with his boundless energy, is what makes the world seem a darker and less promising place now that he is gone. We were so different in training and character that our collaboration exemplified to me how and why differences, handled in a learningful way, are essential to what we need to do to survive on this planet.

Morten was already declining seriously when we published our final book together and yet his idea for an open and diverse introduction to AR still seemed vital to me. When I found he could no longer collaborate, I proposed doing a new edition with Johan Elvemo Ravn and Koen Bartels, an edition that will be dedicated to Morten's memory. And as Morten would have expected, these two new collaborators have moved the project to an entirely new dimension in which "sustainability" (ecological and social) is the be all and end all of AR. I am sure Morten would have approved of the direction of this new learning arena.

Ann Martin

When I met Morten Levin, it was in the context of Morten as researcher. In 1987 he came to Cornell as a visiting scholar for the express purpose of learning from William Foote Whyte, author of *Street Corner Society* and *Learning from the Field*. By that time Bill Whyte had removed himself from the academic faculty of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) and established a more action-oriented group, Programs for Employment and Workplace Systems (PEWS) in Extension. We were a motley and small group, where all except for Bill were more focused on action rather than research. Bill was no longer active in doing fieldwork. We were a former merchant marine, one graduate student, two newly degreed master's students in ILR, one management educator, and one Extension entrepreneur. The latter two had formed the group with Bill because in Extension we had to earn our keep through fees charged to clients, and because Peter Lazes, the entrepreneur, had a connection with our first and notable client, the Xerox Corporation.

What Morten fell into that year was a crew of enthusiastic facilitators of labor-management cooperation, a far cry from the professionals at Norway's Work Research Institute, as we were not doing "research." We were barely recording what we were doing, although Bill nudged us frequently in that direction. Morten was a different sort. In no time at all, he injected PEWS with his extraordinary energy for learning. He traveled with us; he co-designed a conference; he infused us with inquiry. By June of 1988, he had us committed to publishing a book with analytical chapters on each of our projects. Of course, he was an author of one of the chapters. This was the only book to come out of the PEWS work, per se, although Bill Whyte continued to publish on participatory action research on a theoretical level.

PEWS' next encounter with Morten was in 1989 when he brought a cohort of NTNU doctoral students to the US. They were not just a cohort; they were, as one of them told me quite insistently, "a group." A group they were, committed to each other and to

what Morten would call “co-generative learning” among themselves as well as with members of the organizations with which they worked. Both Roger Klev and Johan Ravn, other authors of this tribute, were part of that group.

Reflecting on those early years knowing Morten, I see clearly that he was an extraordinary teacher. He could be a didact, such as when he wrote or lectured on action research. And he was, after all, a “professor” at NTNU. But in my experience, he was equally or even more influential as a provocateur, a role model, and a persistent practitioner of inquiry. (To doctoral students, “What is your argument?” *ad nauseum* until they figured it out.)

In the early 1990s Morten collaborated with others (see Davydd Greenwood) to organize small international seminars to provoke writing and reflection among action researchers. Others write in this reflective piece about the extraordinary educational entrepreneurship this revealed in Morten. I will simply note that while I understood he hoped these seminars would lead to published work, they were all held in a manner of collective reflection that I had not experienced in academia or certainly in Extension. The very idea that we could learn from each other rather than prance and preen was new to me and transformational. Of course by that time, we knew the work of Donald Schön, author of *The Reflective Practitioner*, but Morten actually practiced it.

Morten returned to the United States and Cornell a few more times in the 1990s. We always had a desk for him at PEWS, and it never took prodding to get him involved with our work. Two classic Morten “moments” stand out from this period.

First was his follow-up to my invitation as then Director of PEWS to evaluate our organization. Of course he interviewed each of us before making his report in a staff meeting. His analysis? “PEWS is nothing more than a consulting hotel.” THIS was Morten the provocateur at his best. For me it was a great clarifying moment, a moment that shaped career decisions for the rest of my life. Alas, for the organization, it stirred nothing more than acknowledgement that if we didn’t consult, consult, consult, we would not survive financially. Researchers we were not; we did not pick up on the challenge and ask what we might do about this predicament.

The second “moment” developed in the course of Morten’s coaching us in search conference practice. I invited him along to the province of Alberta, Canada, where 100 city engineers, politicians, and concerned citizens considered a second major airport for the province. With Morten’s help, a PEWS colleague and I had designed the conference. Morten took the role of observer and leader of our internal reflection sessions. He gave no direct instruction. However, there were exhausting behind-the-scenes sessions during which he challenged us with questions about our process and the role we would take as outsider researchers. When I chose to introduce conflict resolution into the search process, Morten resisted the idea, but he left the final decision to us. In the words of a Swedish student I had met in those earlier seminars, he refused to “steal the learning.” He also respected our disagreement.

Before my degree in industrial and labor relations, I was a Harvard-trained teacher with some practice in the secondary classroom. I knew that students learned when they were engaged. I knew that when they were active in lively classroom discussion they expanded their analytical capacities in ways that couldn't be taught directly. But it was watching and working with Morten that taught me how critical open-ended inquiry and reflection were to learning.

The energy Morten had for learning was enormous and magnetic. So, too, was his energy for organizing learning arenas. This energy led to the invention of the alternative doctoral program, EDWOR. I leapt at the offer to be added to the faculty as the writing teacher (rhetoric is what it was, really). I'll never know whether in his mind Morten also saw my job as pedagogical mentor and interrupter, but by that time, inspired by Morten, I had immersed myself and even received a doctorate in adult learning. Many times during the 10 years of EDWOR, Morten kept silent when I stepped outside of my role as writing teacher to nudge the faculty away from lecturing toward a more Socratic practice.

Leading EDWOR was hard work for Morten. He had a group of faculty, but we were not his students, and we weren't always tolerant of inquiry or available for collective reflection. In spite of this, Morten remained dedicated to this innovative and significant educational project.

Toward the end of his life, as a result of a debate we had about European and US acceptance of immigrants, Morten thought he and I should find a way to address the world's immigration problems with action research. And so we embarked on a study of how that might work. The ostensible goal was, as it always was with Morten, a piece of writing, but what lay behind that was his indefatigable passion for and faith in the power of collaborative inquiry. Unfortunately, Morten's advancing Parkinson's robbed him of the chance to see this project through, and without his vision, I let it rest. I doubt that he would approve.

Johan Elvemo Ravn

It can be said as simply as this: Morten is the reason why I ended up in academia and research. I got to know him through my master's studies at The University of Trondheim. When we were close to starting our work on our final master's thesis, my fellow student Roger and I contacted Morten to ask if he would be our supervisor. His response was: "What do you intend to do afterwards?" He was fishing for potential research talent, I think. Why not, I thought then, without much pause for reflection. This became the start of a relationship, first as a student, a research assistant, then a doctoral student, and eventually a colleague and friend. In the autumn of 1989, six of us were admitted to "SUM", what was to become the first of a whole series of different action research-oriented doctoral programs under the auspices of Morten. He developed this first in collaboration with Max Elden, a close colleague at the time.

It is worth mentioning the extent to which we in SUM were exposed to others in Max and Morten's network within work research and action research, both nationally and globally: collaborators such as Ann and Davydd, but also people with whom they had disagreements. A good illustration was the ACRES program, with participants from seven countries. The objective of ACRES was to increase among action researchers the will and ability to write. But the program also taught lessons about the dynamics of disagreement and conflict over the role of researchers in action research. Shortly before, Morten had published "Cogenerative Learning" with Max Elden, in which they wrote, "Our theory, based on our practice, is that we intentionally and strongly influence content." And further: "Results are considered a co-product of the contributions from insiders and outsiders, learning through participating in co-generative dialogue." The positioning here is clear: the action researcher should not "hold back" in order to make airtime for the insider participants. When the outsider action researcher has relevant knowledge, then he/she should contribute this. Several participants in ACRES disputed this position. Their argument was that this meant the researcher took on a form of expert role and would thereby influence the process too much with his/her model power. Or put in a slightly different way: with a researcher role such as that described by Elden and Levin, one risks that the action research process will not be free, but manipulative.

Now when I reflect on this in the context of my previous experiences with Morten as a teacher and supervisor, the assumed manipulative power argument melts into air. In the classroom, Morten was rarely at the front of the blackboard to convey the key insights. He did not give lectures. What he did was give us the syllabus list and ask us to take responsibility for distributing the task of presenting it to the class, asking us to identify learning points, counterarguments, and criticisms. His role was to orchestrate the reflections and discussions between us, and sometimes intervene with open questions. In addition, when mentoring thesis writing, he was dialogic and open and inviting in relation to other perspectives, certainly to my frustration on several occasions. In settings like this, he was the superior in terms of experience, professional insight and all other forms of resources or power bases that come into play. Being a 'participant' or 'co-learner' in such situations, being able to participate without dominating, intentionally or unintentionally, was a skill of his. So, when I read that he "intentionally and strongly influenced content" in situations where insiders and outsiders were "learning through participating in the co-generative dialogue", I don't see a contradiction. He showed with his practice that co-generative learning was a possibility across resource asymmetries.

Morten's moral principles ran deep but could also show themselves directly. When I was a PhD student, Morten and I teamed up with another professor and another student to write an article. We ran several conceptual discussions together. Then it happened that the other professor had to leave for other work, which meant that it was the other three of us who wrote the article. Morten was crystal clear: the other professor

was a good colleague and close collaborator, but no one who had not participated in the writing work should stand as an author. But when the colleague was removed from the list of authors, he was angry. I understand his reaction: he had certainly participated in the concept development of the article. But for Morten this was not enough, perhaps an indication of a certain stubbornness and rigidity. (And there were probably a few grams of this that could show at times.) As far as I know, however, the principle worked both ways. Morten did not co-publish with anyone unless he had written his part.

Morten was political. Not in the sense that his research was unduly colored and fraudulent, but in the sense that the projects he undertook were in line with his values. And he could be clear about these values. One of his early projects was called “the trade union’s resources for action” (*Fagforeningenes handlingsressurser*), and it was about just this: how can an action research process contribute to a trade union’s capacity to shape conditions for its members. The project was about functional development of strengths and competencies, but it was also about ‘meaning construction’, and it was based on several of Morten’s core commitments, such as participation, democratization, and equal value between participants. We find these same values, and the twin foci of functional analysis/problem solving and sense-making/meaning construction in all his projects, whether they were about unions, technology transfer, business development, industrial relations, community development, or university reform.

Morten published about co-generative learning on several occasions and these texts offer good aid for practitioners and action researchers. But Morten’s commitment to co-generation shows itself in everything else he wrote, in respect paid to others, in a pedagogy that is always about staging for participation, in communications that show that others’ perspectives are as legitimate and correct as your own, even if you yourself are a prominent professional and the others are students, engineers, skilled workers or managers.

The last writing project I did with Morten was a book in which Tore Nilssen, Lisbeth Øyum, Morten and I tracked the development of Norwegian work life, with a particular focus on democratic development and learning mechanisms (*Demokrati i arbeidslivet* / “Democracy in working life”). The book did well, and recently the publisher urged us to create a revised edition. We aim to do this over the next year. Morten cannot be part of the writing group this time, and based on his own criteria, he cannot be on the author’s list, but his presence will perhaps be even stronger than in the original edition.

Olav Eikeland

My gratitude to Morten is very personal. I first met Morten probably in 1981 or 1982 at a meeting in Trondheim while I was an elected student leader member of the “central committee” (*arbeidsutvalg*) of the National Students Union in Norway (NSU), with a strong engagement in (and for a year a formal responsibility for) what in Norwegian

was called *fag- og profesjonskritikk*, i.e. “the immanent critique” of and also the fight for political reform (or even revolution) of the establishment-integrated roles and tasks of the sciences, universities, research tasks, and professions. At the time I was on the path to a Master’s in Sociology and a member of a group called “Sociology and critique.” (I gave up becoming a sociologist the more I learned about so-called “empirical sociology” or “modern empirical social research” in general with its reductionist concept of “experience” and “empirical” as “data”.) I have always felt that Morten and I had a mutual respect for each other as “fellow travelers and fighters” in this “*fagkritiske*” (intellectually critical) approach.

We met again during my time at the WRI, probably first at the Thorsrud memorial conference in the summer of 1987, where I also met four NTH students, Sveinung Skule, Øystein Fossen, Roger Klev, and Johan Elvemo, now Ravn. They interviewed me about my role as an “industry-engaged” development consultant-researcher under the first amendment (from 1982) of the negotiated constitution (*Hovedavtalen*) of Norwegian work life (in the car dealers’ industry). From our very first meeting, Morten always had an eye for what I was working on, even when I left contemporary critical theory and started digging my way backwards through the history of philosophy and science, searching for roots of action research and “learning by doing.” In this he differed from my colleagues at the WRI, who paid little attention to my philosophical explorations. Had Morten (and Davydd) not mentioned an “Aristotelian approach” to action research in the middle of my WRI time, I believe it would have been completely and actively silenced (“collegially”) at the WRI. Since Morten saw me and recognized my philosophical work as action research relevant, however, he invited me to teach in Trondheim, to join others from Trondheim in travelling to Cornell in 1994 (where I by sheer luck happened to share seats with Davydd on the plane from NYC to Ithaca), entrust me with teaching philosophy of science for his students in Trondheim, and more.

In closing

Action research now has a strong foothold in Norwegian universities, research institutions, and organized work life. This is the result of the efforts of many, but some will be remembered as particularly important. Morten Levin is one of them. Einar Thorsrud designed and led the Industrial Democracy projects, and Bjørn Gustavsen was instrumental in creating AR programs in Sweden and Norway. Morten established and led educational programs, PhD programs and research projects where AR and participatory change were central. He worked directly with counties in local community development and new forms of organizing. He envisioned, created and led PhD programs based on AR, in close cooperation with industries and research institutions. He also left a big footprint in the international AR network. At home and abroad he engaged in learning processes with a large number of students and researchers who know well that their thinking as well as careers and practices are deeply influenced by working

with or being mentored by Morten. The five of us have experienced Morten in one or several of these capacities, and we remember him as always engaged and engaging, always interesting and interested, and as a highly esteemed colleague, mentor, and friend.

About the authors

Olav Eikeland, passed away September 1st, 2023. He was full professor of Education and Work-Life Research at Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway. In 1993, completed his PhD on the relevance of ancient dialogical philosophy for modern empirical social research and action research the University of Oslo. From 1985 to 2088, he worked at the Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo with action research and organizational learning in Norwegian work life, and theoretically with basic conceptualizations and methodological challenges in action research and empirical social research. From 2008 he worked at OsloMet with similar areas of research. He has published many articles and books, among others *The ways of Aristotle: Aristotelian Phrónêsis, Aristotelian Philosophy of Dialogue, and Action Research* and (in Norwegian) *På sporet av en syvende forfatning. Aristoteles og den norske samarbeidsmodellen – makt, dialog og organisasjon-slæring*, which summarizes experience from three decades of work research at the WRI.

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