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*Special issue of the International Journal of Action Research as part of the  
Conference to take place in San Sebastian in 2020*

# What could happen when action research meets ideas of sociomateriality?

*Stephen Allen and Judi Marshall*

## **Abstract**

Action research in its various forms highlights the interactional and relational ways in which research and knowledge become socially produced *with* people, with intentions of positively transforming real-world relations. In parallel, there is a growing interest in organisational research informed by the field of Science and Technology Studies, about the potential significance of matter to understanding how processes of researching interact with the world. By experimenting with connections to debates about sociomateriality, this paper explores what implications there might be for understanding and performing action research, especially given that action researchers are often values-oriented and attached, and acknowledge that they want to change material issues.

**Keywords:** action research, affordance, matter, sociomaterial, sustainability

## **Qué podría pasar cuando la investigación-acción se reúne con las ideas de socio-materialidad?**

### **Resumen**

La investigación-acción en sus diversas formas resalta los caminos de interacción y relación en donde la investigación y el conocimiento se convierten socialmente producidos *con* personas, con intenciones de transformar positivamente las relaciones del mundo real. Paralelamente, existe un creciente interés en la investigación organizacional informada por el campo de Estudios de Ciencia y Tecnología, sobre el significado potencial de la materia para comprender cómo los procesos de investigación interactúan con el mundo. Al experimentar conexiones con los debates sobre la socio-materialidad, este documento explora qué implicaciones puede tener para comprender y realizar una investigación-acción, especialmente dado que los investigadores-acción a menudo están unidos y orientados en valores, y reconocen que desean cambiar los asuntos materiales.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación-acción, *affordance*, materia, sociomaterial, sostenibilidad.

## Introducing attentions and purposes

Action research involves co-producing knowledge and action to positively transform real-world relations (e.g. Bradbury 2015; Cooke & Wolfram Cox 2005). This article considers how debates in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) (e.g. Barad 2007, 2013; Law 2004; Orlikowski & Scott 2008) can help to develop a perspective of action research as materially as well as socially (co)produced. In particular, we draw on the concept of ‘affordances’ (Bloomfield, Latham, & Vurdubakis 2010; Hutchby 2001; Jarzabkowski & Pinch 2013) to explore how action researchers can be critically and reflexively aware of ways that sociomaterial relations can shape possibilities for action.

This paper is offered in the service of fostering organisational and societal change for sustainability. We understand action on sustainability is imperative so that future generations of humans and non-human species can flourish together on the Earth. At these times of, to us, profound environmental crisis (e.g. IPCC 2018; Steffen et al. 2015), we are acutely aware of the limitations of offering yet another *damned* journal article. But we find articles valuable when they prompt us to feel surprised about aspects of being and researching that we might have taken-for-granted, making us pause to consider other possibilities for action. So, by developing a sociomaterial perspective we want to attempt to extend visibility on the significance of matter to the relations involved in action researching.

We believe that developing a sociomaterial perspective is vital for action researchers, particularly those who are values-oriented and attached, as material relations matter. We assume that paying attention to emergence and interdependence are crucial for creating change with integrity, which means that action researching requires systemic ways of thinking, acting and being (Burns 2007; Flood 2010; Marshall 2016; Wilson, Walsh, & Bush 2018). Consequently, sociomateriality can offer possibilities for action researchers to develop congruent ontologies which are defined by relationality and interconnectivity, because we cannot change the world without transforming and being transformed by matter. How we make and reproduce ‘boundaries’ between ourselves and matter is a fundamental concern (Midgley 2000). We are responsible to matter, especially in connection with climate change and loss of biodiversity. By understanding matter as active in creating our understanding, and so significant for fostering critical action, we hope to help to enrich debates about implications of sociomaterial relations in action researching.

## Positioning contributions within action research debates

Action research is a ‘family’ label applied to a richly diverse range of approaches (Bradbury 2015; Cooke & Wolfram Cox 2005; Reason & Bradbury 2001, 2008). Whilst there is no one ‘it’, we are drawn to key characteristics in formulations of action research which foreground being in the service of human and ecological flourishing.

In a seminal contribution to action research debates, Reason and Torbert describe an ‘action turn’ in social research generally as involving a need to develop knowledge that relates to “a practical knowing embodied in the moment-to-moment action of each researcher/practitioner” (2001, p. 7). This turn or paradigm is positioned as contrasting significantly

# Participant and co-operative research within a social movement of recyclable materials collectors

## Methodological reflections on a long-term political praxis<sup>1</sup>

*Cristiano Benites Oliveira and Emil Albert Sobottka*

### **Abstract**

This article presents methodological reflections on a participant research within the National Movement of Recyclable Materials Collectors (MNCR) in Brazil. It emphasises methodological aspects of the researchers' long-term participation in the process of questioning and denaturalising of political, social, and economic inequalities by the collectors, understood as subjects of their self-organisation. It addresses quality criteria for long-term participant research, and the role of the scholar in the tension between engaging in social movement and being an integral part of academic life. The development of a master's thesis and of a doctoral dissertation between 2010 and 2016 sets the background. This article is a systematisation of the hermeneutic practice focusing on the research relations and processes of sharing of meanings between actors and researcher, aiming at the improvement of the subjects' political praxis.

**Keywords:** recyclable materials collectors, praxis, reflexivity, denaturalisation of inequalities.

### **Investigación participante y cooperativa dentro de un movimiento social de recolectores de materiales reciclables. Reflexiones metodológicas sobre una praxis política a largo plazo**

### **Resumen**

Este artículo presenta reflexiones metodológicas sobre una investigación participante dentro del Movimiento Nacional de Recolectores de Materiales Reciclables (MNCR) en Brasil. Enfatiza los aspectos metodológicos de la participación a largo plazo de los investigadores en el proceso de cuestionamiento y desnaturalización de las desigualdades políticas, sociales y económicas por parte de los recolectores, entendidos como sujetos de su autoorganización. Aborda los criterios de calidad para la investigación participante a largo plazo y el papel del académico en la tensión entre participar en el movimiento social y ser parte integral de la vida académica. El desarrollo de una tesis de maestría y una tesis doctoral entre 2010 y 2016 establece el telón de fondo de la reflexión. Este artículo es una sistematización de la práctica hermenéutica centrada en las relaciones de investigación y los procesos de intercambio de significados entre actores e investigadores, con el objetivo de mejorar la práctica política de los sujetos.

**Palabras clave:** recolectores de materiales reciclables, praxis, reflexividad, desnaturalización de las desigualdades.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Gustavo Matiuizzi de Souza.

## Introduction

In this article we seek to report our participation in the National Movement of Recyclable Materials Collectors (MNCR) in Brazil. Through a praxis of socio-political organisation, collectors of recyclable materials sought to denaturalise political, economic, and social inequalities, to legitimise their activity as a dignified and socially relevant occupation, as well as to constitute for themselves spaces of autonomy. The intention is to present methodological aspects of the process of militant participation, done simultaneously with academic activities, in a long-term strategy.

The use of materials discarded as ‘junk’ by people living in poverty and misery in Brazil was gradually transformed from the 1980s into an alternative occupation, although precarious, for a growing contingent of people. As material recycling became industry-wide and became thematic (concerning environmental protection), the activity of picking, sorting, and reselling materials started to provide a small income. With the support of civil entities, various groups began to organise themselves in the form of associations and cooperatives, some of them formalised, others only as solidarity bonds (Bortoli 2013). A significant number of people were already living in this activity even before there was an official policy for the reuse of solid waste, created in 2010 (Souza et al. 2014; De Lorena Diniz Chaves et al. 2014). In the wake of the organisation process of this population, the National Movement of Recyclable Materials Collectors was created in 2001, in a congress that gathered more than 1700 collectors from different parts of Brazil (Pereira & Goes 2016; Fergutz et al. 2011).

The importance of deepening the methodological discussion stems from the fact that, in the field of Social Sciences, scholars engaged in practices of long-term social transformation still find difficulties in methodological terms to account for their own praxis in assisting in the thematisation and understanding of social problems experienced by sectors of the population. This difficulty derives from the classic, rigid separation between the subject of the research activity and the object to be researched, as inherited from the positivist tradition. However, there are consolidated methodological paths that break with this separation. These paths are systematised participant methodologies within, among others, the social and education sciences (Brandão & Streck 2006; Torres Carrillo 2010). The participant methodology becomes applicable in a satisfactory way insofar as it allows to interpret the relations established between researchers and researched, contributing to the improvement of both praxis and research itself.

We use here empirical data of a master’s thesis and a doctoral dissertation (Oliveira 2010; 2016). Both the synthesis of performance experiments and the theoretical and methodological categories of interpretation of the empirical data seek to provide an understanding of the effects of co-operation on the strategic reflections established between researchers and collectors. It is hoped that they will contribute to the consolidation of a critical and reflexive field of study of situations, in which economic, political, and social strategies are shared between the militant-researcher and the social movement in which he/she participates.

To account for this synthesis, the article is structured as follows: first, we address some assumptions and quality criteria of participant and co-operative research. Second, we

# Action Research and Teacher Education: the use of research in a classroom for the transformation of reality

*Nilda Stecanela, Alessandra Chaves Zen, and Fabiana Pauletti*

## **Abstract**

This text aims to provide reflections on an education-investigation experience within a continuing education course for teachers of public schools in a municipality located in the region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The object of this course involved the use of classroom research as a pedagogical tool, which was developed in an action research perspective. The participants of the course were challenged to develop investigative skills on daily school life, based on the construction and development of a research project focused on the concerns related to their contemporary teaching practices. The analysis of the modes of reception and appropriation of those involved in the research, and expressed in the materials produced, suggests how difficult it is to exercise the passage from naive to epistemological consciousness through criticality. This element reinforces the importance of the process of reflection-action-reflection in the teacher's education and his/her performance.

**Keywords:** teacher education, action research, research in the classroom, reception and appropriation.

## **Investigación-Acción y formación docente: el uso de la investigación en un aula para la transformación de la realidad**

### **Resumen**

Este texto tiene como objetivo proporcionar reflexiones sobre una experiencia de investigación educativa dentro de un curso de educación continua para maestros de escuelas públicas en un municipio ubicado en la región del estado de Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. El objetivo de este curso involucró el uso de la investigación en el aula como herramienta pedagógica, que se desarrolló en una perspectiva de investigación- acción. Los participantes del curso fueron desafiados a desarrollar habilidades investigativas sobre el cotidiano escolar a partir de la construcción y el desarrollo de un proyecto de investigación centrado en las inquietudes relacionadas con sus prácticas docentes contemporáneas. El análisis de los modos de recepción y apropiación de los involucrados en la investigación y expresados en los materiales producidos sugiere lo difícil que es el ejercicio del paso de la conciencia ingenua a la conciencia epistemológica a través de la criticidad. Este elemento refuerza la importancia del proceso de reflexión-acción-reflexión en la formación y en la actuación docente.

**Palabras clave:** formación docente, investigación-acción, investigación en el aula, recepción y apropiación.

## Introduction

The use of research in teacher education has the potential to promote the transformation of reality as it challenges us to *think right*, an attitude that Paulo Freire (2014) associates with *thinking about*, in other words, the process of reflection on the practice from the gradual overcoming of naive consciousness, towards the critical and epistemological consciousness.

The formative process triggered by the adoption of research in the classroom as teaching methodology moves the teaching trajectory and the school experience with possibilities to develop, respectively, *research on the teacher and research on the student*, precepts defended by Pedro Demo.

By means of the investigative skills offered by the presence of *research as an educational principle* in the school, both teachers and students are involved in a posture of openness to the construction of knowledge and the constitution of knowledge, based on the analysed realities, whether they are those that refer to the phenomena of daily life, or those related to the cultural and scientific legacy historically built by humanity. In addition, the problematic and unhappy posture in relation to victimising, blaming and immobilising images covered in *cultures of complaint* (Stecanela 2018), which commonly cross-link the pedagogical relationship, can give other contours to contemporary teaching practices and experiences.

The use of research in the classroom as a pedagogical tool can awaken students' interests in investigating problems of the context in which they are inserted, leading to a polarised education with social demands (Deboer 2006; Alake-Tuenter et al., 2012). The cultivation of students' concerns signals an educational process in which the knowledge base already built acts as an input to problematise the investigation context, formulate problems and research hypotheses towards the construction of new knowledge. And action research is imperative in this formative process, because it allows teachers in training, as well as teacher educators, the constant and systematic opportunity to reflect, implement and improve teaching practice in *praxis* (Tripp 2005).

Faced with this threshold, some questions emerge: To what extent do the teachers' conceptions of the challenges that accompany the contemporary school influence their ways of perceiving and intervening in the daily practice of teaching? How can we give visibility to the affirmative practices carried out inside the school and, often, silenced by the fanfare of the discourses of reproduction of the moaning that paralyses the possibilities of the transformation of reality? How can we involve the group of teachers of the school in the reflection on the practice itself, in order to contemplate the advances and to overcome the evidenced needs? Drawing from these questions and a set of other questions that were part of the process that triggered the education and the investigation, this text seeks to systematise some results.

The research described here is the result of a partnership between the University of Caxias do Sul (UCS) and the Education Department of a municipality in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, for an extension course for teachers of Basic Education, lasting 40 hours. The object of the course involved the use of research in the classroom as a pedagogical tool, which was developed in an action research perspective, aiming at the



# Language Education and primary school children: the story of using stories

*Christina Nicole Giannikas*

## **Abstract**

The present study concentrates on the development of interactive skills in the L2 and the pedagogical aspects of Young Language Learners' (YLLs) through the use of story telling. Such an approach reveals the benefits of encouraging creativity in learning and, as a result, captures the dynamics of the classroom and the progress of the learner. The data derives from an Action Research study carried out as part of a longitudinal study in South Western Greece, where storytelling is a neglected language learning source. The research concentrates on YLLs of a Beginners level, aged 7-9 years old. The results show the advantageous use of Action Research as a tool of intervention to apply necessary change in language teaching contexts.

**Key words:** action research, language education, early language learning, storytelling

## **Educación lingüística y niños de la escuela primaria: la historia del uso de historias**

### **Resumen**

El presente estudio se concentra en el desarrollo de habilidades interactivas en la L2 y los aspectos pedagógicos de Jóvenes Aprendices de Lenguaje (YLLs, por sus siglas en inglés) mediante el uso de la narración. Este enfoque revela los beneficios de fomentar la creatividad en el aprendizaje y, como resultado, capturar la dinámica del aula y el progreso del alumno. Los datos derivan de un estudio de Investigación-Acción realizado como parte de un estudio longitudinal en el Suroeste de Grecia, donde la narración es una fuente de aprendizaje de idiomas descuidada. La investigación se concentra en el nivel de YLLs para el nivel de principiantes, con edades entre 7-9 años. Los resultados muestran el uso ventajoso de la Investigación-Acción como una herramienta de intervención para aplicar los cambios necesarios en los contextos de enseñanza de idiomas.

**Palabras clave:** investigación acción, educación lingüística, aprendizaje temprano de idiomas, narración de historias

## Introduction

Using stories, in any educational context, is undoubtedly beneficial and rich in pedagogical potential. In language education, the use of stories has been argued to be an effective language learning tool that meets the cognitive, emotional and psychological demands of the Young Language Learner (YLL). Stories offer children meaningful experiences that their imagination can relate to and, as Fillmore and Snow (2000) have argued, can sustain and enhance foreign language growth. Additionally, using stories in the language classroom gives teachers the unique opportunity to provide their YLLs with the motivation to play with language while building an appreciation of its sounds and meaning of words (Rubin & Wilson 1995). The fact that children are familiar with the nature of stories from their L1, makes the process a positive introduction to foreign language education, provided that it is presented in a context YLLs are familiar and comfortable with (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2002). Despite the positive outcomes that occur when storytelling is included in language education, many contexts do not include it in their curriculum, particularly in teacher-centred educational settings. The objectives of the present study are to 1) define the current language learning situation within the Greek context due to the complexities embedded in teacher-centred approaches in the YLL classroom, and 2) investigate the potential of introducing change through practitioner inquiry and reflections. More specifically, the focus of this article will be on storytelling as a student-centred teaching tool, where there will be a display of the background of storytelling, followed by the implementation of Action Research (AR) and the extent to which the methodology has broadened the potential of storytelling in the YLL classroom.

## A Story telling Background

The art of storytelling is known to be as old as time, and is a form of an oral tradition found in all cultures (Nikolov, Mihaljević Djigunović, Mattheoudakis, Lundberg & Flanagan 2007). By including stories in language learning, the power of oral conversations may be exceeded (Dickinson, Griffith, Golnkoff & Hirsh-Pasek 2012) therefore, it is no surprise that stories are preferred by a number of language teachers since they help create a motivating environment, and encourage YLLs to use their imagination and learn while having fun.

The approach of the storyteller could provide a rich literature experience and encourage oral language development (Isbell, Sobol, Lindaeur & Lowrance 2004) while also prompting students to step out of their comfort zone and engage themselves in the literature and culture of the target language. In agreement with this, Nikolov et al. (2007) states that an early and regular exposure to stories can help YLLs enrich their schemata and interpret new information and experiences. Researchers such as Krashen (1981), Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) have reached the conclusion that L2 learning occurs when the input is meaningful, interesting and comprehensible. Furthermore, the comprehensible and meaningful input that stories provide helps activate the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a hypothetical tool in the brain that helps children learn and understand language (Chomsky 1968). According to Krashen (1981, 1993), learners become able to induce language elements from the data they receive, meaning that storytelling stimulates phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics and

## Systematisation of experience: theory and practice

Cordero, D. B., & Torres Carrillo, A. (2017). *La Sistematización como investigación interpretativa crítica*. Bogotá: Editorial El Búho.

Carolina Schenatto da Rosa

Systematisation of experience is widely known and discussed in Latin America, and in other parts of the world. However, what does it mean? What is systematisation of experience? Is it a scientific method? Is it a methodology? Who can do it and why? Is it focused on social workers or on theory? Is systematisation of experience related to critical theory and, at the same time, based on the experience of their performers? What is the relation between theory and practices? What is the relation between systematisation of experience, popular education and participatory research? The answers for these and other questions are addressed in *La Sistematización como investigación interpretativa crítica*<sup>1</sup>, written by Alfonso Torres Carrillo and Disney Barragán Cordero.

Both authors are acknowledged researchers, who have contributed to the epistemological and methodological foundations of systematisation from a critical approach. They are professors and researchers at the National Pedagogical University of Colombia, working with popular education processes, social movements, and participatory action research (PAR). They also offer courses about systematisation, yielding new scientific and social knowledge and perspectives from the global South. More than merely introduce systematisation of experience as a concept and a methodology, the book is, in itself, the systematisation of their experiences as researchers and educators, presenting how they understand and schematise systematisation of experience in the last 25 years.

The book is organised in four sections. In the first part, *Emergencia, trayectoria y sentidos de la sistematización*<sup>2</sup>, the authors give us a historical overview of the Latin American context, demonstrating how and when systematisation of experience started to be used as a method of scientific investigation. Highlighting the inherent relationship between popular education, PAR and systematisation, Torres & Cordero emphasise the ethical and political commitment that these fields had with the emancipatory perspective to social transformation (Torres 2010).

In the 70s, with the emergence of popular movements and organisations that questioned the imperialist and colonialist character of capitalism in Latin America, the popular culture intensified. This created a breeding ground for the development of different proposals as theology of liberation, philosophy of liberation, and the popular education movement, that

1 Systematisation as critical interpretive research.

2 Emergence, trajectory and meanings of systematisation