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Systematisation of experiences within the framework of the pedagogical approach towards territorial development: a contribution to action research from the Latin American tradition

Pablo Costamagna and Eleonora Spinelli

Abstract This article attempts to link different approaches to action research by sharing a concept that holds an important place in the processes related to participatory action research in Latin America. Such a concept is systematisation.

In Latin America, the framework of the systematisation of experiences indicates that it is a particular research method generated from popular education and social work, and that it shares its commitments regarding social transformation. Systematisation arises as a proposal that is based on and learns from accumulated experiences, along with new forms of participatory research and evaluation. Thus, one of the ever-present challenges is to define knowledge production methodologies appropriate to the way of thinking and acting of those who depart from practice, from action (Centro de Estudios para la Educación Popular CEPEP, 2010).

Within this framework, the concept of systematisation and its challenges in the specific context of territorial development in Argentina are addressed in order to integrate new learning into action research debates, not only in Latin America, but also outside its boundaries. To this purpose, we rely on the lessons learned by a team from the Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (UTN) from Argentina based in Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) working for the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales Praxis. This team has been interacting with action research teams from the Basque Country (Spain) and the University of Agder (Norway), a space where the systematisation of experiences has emerged as a relevant and unknown methodological element in the aforementioned European contexts.

Keywords: Systematisation; Action research; Territorial development; lessons learned

Sistematización de experiencias en el marco del enfoque pedagógico del desarrollo territorial: un aporte a la investigación acción desde la tradición Latino Americana

Resumen En este artículo se intenta construir un puente entre distintas aproximaciones a la investigación acción compartiendo un concepto que ocupa un lugar importante en los procesos vinculados a la investigación acción participativa en América Latina. Este concepto es el de la sistematización.

En América Latina, el marco del trabajo de sistematización de experiencias indica que es una manera particular de investigar, generada desde la educación popular y el trabajo social y que comparte sus compromisos en torno de la transformación social. La sistematización surge como una propuesta que recupera y aprende de las experiencias acumuladas, junto con las nuevas formas de investigación y evaluación participativa. Es así que uno de los desafíos

siempre presentes es el de definir metodologías de producción de conocimiento adecuadas a la forma de pensar y actuar de aquellos y aquellas que parten de la práctica, de la acción (Centro de Estudios para la Educación Popular CEPEP, 2010).

En este marco, se aborda el concepto de sistematización y sus retos en el contexto específico del desarrollo territorial en Argentina con el objeto de integrar nuevos aprendizajes en los debates de la investigación acción no sólo dentro, sino también fuera de América Latina. Para ello nos basamos en los aprendizajes de un equipo de la Universidad Tecnológica Nacional de Argentina (UTN) con sede en Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) desde el Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales Praxis. Este equipo ya viene interactuando con equipos de investigación acción del País Vasco (España) y la Universidad de Agder (Noruega), espacio donde la sistematización de experiencias ha emergido como un elemento metodológico relevante y desconocido en los contextos europeos citados.

Palabras claves: Sistematización; Investigación Acción; Desarrollo Territorial; aprendizajes

Introduction

Action research has often been defined as the convergence of various approaches that often even have different epistemological bases (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Among them, participatory action research is widely recognised in the way it has been developed in Latin America. The authors who have been most referenced in this area are Paulo Freire (1996) and Orlando Fals Borda (2009). However, in publications that cover action research at the international level and are frequently published in English, Latin American experiences are not as present as one would expect given this referentiality. Language can be one of the reasons, since frequently, the people involved in these processes are connected to literature in Spanish and English, that are disseminated in parallel circuits.

In this article, we want to link, in a publication aimed at readers of English, different approaches to action research by sharing a methodology that holds an important place in the processes related to participatory action research in Latin America, yet it is not mentioned, for example, in the *Encyclopedia of Action Research* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Such a concept is systematisation.

The interest that this concept may raise outside Latin America is derived from the lessons learned by a team from the Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (UTN) from Argentina based in Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) and the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales Praxis with teams of action research from the Basque Country (Spain) and the University of Agder (Norway) (Costamagna and Larrea, 2015; Canto and Estensoro, 2020). In these international collaborations, the systematisation of experiences has emerged as a relevant methodological element specifically used in the Latin American context and whose equivalent was not easy to find in the European experiences which were analysed. Consequently, this article addresses the concept of systematisation and its challenges in the specific context of territorial development in Argentina, in order to integrate new learnings into action research debates not only within, but also outside Latin America.

In Latin America, the framework of the systematisation of experiences has been developed, fundamentally, from the experiences of popular education and as part of a conglomerate

A Creative Framework of Online Teaching of Public Relations Modules during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Action Research Approach

Layla AlSaqer

Abstract The education of public relations and media modules has been tied in the literature to the professionalism of these disciplines. The contribution of this paper is that it is the first paper that has used a reflective action research methodology to improve the on-line teaching of skill-oriented modules of public relations at the university-level in Bahrain during Covid-19. The instructor/researcher developed two action research cycles where she planned and implemented new teaching strategies based on the students' needs, observed, evaluated, and reflected. The paper finds that action research has been useful in creating a collaborative relationship with the students, and helped to reflect on the e-learning process of public relations modules. The paper recommends the use of action research to improve new creative strategies of teaching other media and mass communication modules at the university-level during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the researcher invites future scholars to take the results of this research further, and use action research to improve creative educational methods that would improve high education in Bahrain after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key words: Public relations/media education; action research; e-learning; Covid-19 pandemic; participatory communication

Un marco creativo para la enseñanza en línea de los módulos de relaciones públicas durante la pandemia de Covid-19: un enfoque de Investigación-Acción

Resumen La educación de relaciones públicas y medios de comunicación se ha vinculado en la literatura al profesionalismo de estas disciplinas. La contribución de este artículo radica en que es el primer artículo que utilizó una metodología de investigación-acción reflexiva para mejorar la enseñanza en línea de módulos orientados a habilidades de relaciones públicas a nivel universitario en Bahrein durante el Covid-19. La instructora/ investigadora desarrolló dos ciclos de investigación-acción donde planificó e implementó nuevas estrategias de enseñanza con base en las necesidades de los estudiantes, observadas, evaluadas y reflexionadas. El resultado del artículo es que la investigación-acción ha sido útil para crear una relación de colaboración con los estudiantes y ayudó a reflexionar sobre el proceso de aprendizaje electrónico de los módulos de relaciones públicas. El artículo recomienda el uso de la investigación-acción para mejorar nuevas estrategias creativas de enseñar a partir de otros módulos y medios de comunicación masiva a nivel universitario durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Además, la investigadora invita a futuros académicos a llevar los resultados de esta investigación más lejos y utilizar la investigación-acción para mejorar los métodos educativos creativos que podrían mejorar la educación superior en Bahrein después de la pandemia de Covid-19.

Palabras clave: Relaciones públicas/educación en medios de comunicación; investigación-acción; aprendizaje electrónico; pandemia de Covid-19; comunicación participativa.

1. Introduction

The education of public relations and media modules has been tied in the literature to the professionalism of mass communication disciplines. Thus, this study addresses the challenges and opportunities accompanied with on-line teaching of public relations modules at the university-level during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. Teaching public relations includes enhancing both theoretical and practical skills. However, the rapid transfer towards distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic challenges the traditional teaching and evaluation methods. Therefore, the author recommends a strategic plan for teaching public relations modules during the pandemic that is based on using creative problem-solving approaches that focus on encouraging the active participation of the students in the e-learning process. In addition, the paper stresses the significance of ensuring a flexible learning environment, and offering sufficient learning technologies. The paper argues that e-learning offers new opportunities for creativity and thinking out of the box, and enhances the need for psychological and technical support to encounter potential challenges in the e-learning environment. The contribution of this paper is that it is the first paper that used a reflective methodology to improve the on-line teaching of skill-oriented modules of public relations at the university-level in Bahrain. The paper aims to bring new theoretical and practical insights of improving e-learning strategies of public relations modules during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Literature review

Several studies have connected public relations education to public relations professionalism (Newsom, Turk & Kuruckeberg, 1999; L'Etang & Pieczka, 1996). However, only a few studies have addressed teaching public relations in the Arab Gulf region (AlSaqer, 2016). Moreover, there is a lack of studies that have addressed on-line teaching of public relations and media modules at the university-level in the Arab Gulf region during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In other disciplines, various studies addressed teaching issues during the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, Vlasov (2020) raised the question: "What forms of education and teaching technology can create the most effective learning environment for students?" The study focused on the legal and psychological-pedagogical aspects of distance and classroom teaching in a historical perspective. It argues that e-learning can facilitate a new level of education in the context of the computer revolution.

Alam, Changjae & Chai (2020) suggested that a systematic approach can be an alternative laboratory assessment (ALA) for Multimedia Engineering modules in the Transnational Education (TNE) program between Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and Beijing University of Post and Telecommunications (BUPT).

The implementation of a bakery sales project during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve the employability of Semai indigenous students

Zainoriza Zainun and Mohd Syafiq Aiman Mat Noor

Abstract During the COVID-19 pandemic, the practitioner and author of this practice in action took the initiative to carry out a piece of action research, by running a bakery sales project with Semai indigenous students. She found that running this project online and remotely was less successful than anticipated, due to the lack of physical proximity and issues with internet connectivity. Thus, in this practice in action, the resulting action research is discussed qualitatively and narratively, asking the following question: how can the practitioner enhance her practice as a special education teacher of Specific Vocational Skills (Bread Making), to improve the employability of Semai indigenous students through a bakery sales project? The bakery sales project not only exposed students to the work environment, but also enabled the practitioner to improve her content knowledge and pedagogy, especially with regard to developing meaningful lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Employability; vocational skills; special education; indigenous students

La implementación de un proyecto de venta de panadería durante la pandemia COVID-19 para mejorar la empleabilidad de los estudiantes indígenas Semai

Resumen Durante la pandemia de COVID-19, la profesional y autora de esta práctica en acción tomó la iniciativa de realizar una investigación-acción, mediante la ejecución de un proyecto de venta de panadería con estudiantes indígenas Semai. Descubrió que ejecutar este proyecto en línea y de forma remota fue menos exitoso de lo previsto, debido a la falta de proximidad física y problemas con la conectividad de internet. Así, en esta práctica en acción, la investigación-acción resultante se discute cualitativa y narrativamente, haciendo la siguiente pregunta: ¿Cómo la profesional puede mejorar su práctica como maestra de educación especial de Habilidades Vocacionales Específicas (Fabricación de Pan), para mejorar la empleabilidad de los estudiantes indígenas Semai a través de un proyecto de venta de panadería? El proyecto de venta de panadería no solo expuso a los estudiantes al entorno laboral, sino que también permitió a la profesional mejorar su conocimiento del contenido y la pedagogía, especialmente en lo que respecta al desarrollo de lecciones significativas durante la pandemia de COVID-19.

Palabras clave: Empleabilidad; habilidades vocacionales; educación especial; estudiantes indígenas.

1. Introduction

This practice in action discusses the practitioner's experiences of being a teacher of Specific Vocational Skills (Bread Making) and conducting action research, through qualitative and narrative analysis. The practitioner, who is the first author of this study, carried out a bakery sales project with three Semai indigenous students. The second author of the practice in action is a critical friend of the practitioner, and their role is discussed in the methodology section. A narrative writing style is used because it plays an essential role in describing the action research process in detail. McNiff (2007) and Whitehead (1989) explain that narrative writing and action research are closely interrelated, as they enable the practitioner to recount their experiences of performing actions to improve self-practice. Thus, the use of the term practitioner in this practice in action is adapted to the narrative approach, as suggested by Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014), Reason and Torbert (2001), and Stenhouse (1975).

Action research is a process that begins with a survey and evaluation of the past professional practices of the practitioner (McNiff, 2017). Kemmis et al. (2014) explain that the degree of survey and assessment in the initial stage of action research is a vital process for the practitioner to explore concerns, dissatisfactions, or issues in specific situations. Thus, this study begins with the survey and evaluation phase, to reflect on the professional practices of the practitioner, and to identify issues and challenges in the context of self-teaching. A discussion and analysis of the survey and initial evaluation phase discusses three aspects of the practitioner's professional practices, namely: (i) special education and vocational skills, (ii) the context of Semai indigenous students and their employability, and (iii) the teaching of current vocational skills in the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Issues and problems

2.1 Special education and vocational skills

"Where there is a will, there is a way" is a proverb that means success will not be achieved without desire and determination. This proverb is synonymous with the journey of the practitioner as a special education teacher who strives wholeheartedly to improve her teaching practices, due to not having a specific background in the field of special education. This field involves various categories of students, and it is thus presents challenges in providing them with meaningful and contextual teaching (O'Hanlon, 2009). Furthermore, the practitioner is responsible for handling the Specific Vocational Skills subject, a new curriculum introduced in 2017 as part of the Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP) in Malaysia. Vocational skills are part of the special education curriculum, as drafted in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which seeks to provide alternative access to special education students to develop and diversify their interests and talents (MOE, 2013).

Schools are institutions that initiate the preparation of practical vocational training for special education students, to enable them to adapt to a situation in the workplace in the future (Mohamed Yusof et al., 2020; Zainun et al., 2020). Cannella and Schaefer (2015) also explain that when vocational skills are planned and implemented in school, students are better prepared to enter the world of work. In this regard, MOE, through its Blueprint, has planned to

“Life as Action Research”

Interview with Richard Ennals by Miren Larrea and Danilo Streck

About Richard Ennals

Richard Ennals was educated at King’s College School Wimbledon, Phillips Academy Massachusetts, King’s College Cambridge, London University Institute of Education, and Imperial College of Science and Technology.

Richard taught History in the UK and Nigeria, before becoming a researcher and then research manager in Advanced Information Technology, at Imperial College and in the UK Government Department of Trade and Industry. He resigned his posts in December 1985, when the UK Government signed a secret Memorandum of Understanding to participate in the American Strategic Defense Initiative, thus endangering the research he was managing. He joined a successful campaign to prevent UK involvement.

Richard moved to Kingston College, then to Kingston University, where he was Professor at Kingston Business School from 1990. His research was based on collaboration in Sweden (National Institute for Working Life and Royal Institute of Technology) and Norway (Work Research Institute and Centre for Senior Policy), and on working with the European Commission. In the UK in 1997 he was co-founder of the UK Work Organisation Network.

Richard has been Emeritus Professor at Kingston University since 2013. He currently has part-time Professorial posts at the University of Agder (Norway) and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He has Visiting Professorial posts at Mykolas Romeris University and Kazimieras Simonavicius University (Lithuania), where he has an Honorary Doctorate, as well as engaging in research with Kathmandu University (Nepal), Sabanci University (Turkey) and the University of Cape Town (South Africa). The common themes are participation and empowerment.

He is an Editor of the *International Journal of Action Research* and Editor in Chief of the *European Journal of Workplace Innovation*. He is author or editor of numerous books, on Education, Information Technology, Working Life and Innovation. For example:

Beginning micro-PROLOG. Ellis Horwood, Chichester 1983.

Star Wars: A Question of Initiative. Wiley, Chichester 1986.

Artificial Intelligence State of the Art Report (Editor). Pergamon Infotech, London 1987.

Work Organisation and Europe as a Development Coalition. (with Bjorn Gustavsen). Benjamin, Amsterdam 1999.

Work Life 2000: Yearbooks 1, 2, 3. Springer, London, 1999, 2000, 2001.

Dialogue, Skill and Tacit Knowledge. (Edited with Bo Goranzon and Maria Hammaren). Wiley, Chichester 2006.

From Slavery to Citizenship. Wiley, Chichester 2007.

Learning together for local innovation: promoting learning regions. (Edited with Bjorn Gustavsen and Barry Nyhan). Cedefop, Luxembourg 2007.

Creating Collaborative Advantage: Innovation and Knowledge Creation in Regional Economies. (Edited with Hans Christian Garmann Johnsen). Gower, Farnham 2012.

Coping with the Future: Rethinking Assumptions for Society, Business and Work. (Edited with Hans Christian Garmann Johnsen and Halvor Holtskog). Routledge, London 2018.

Miren and Danilo: Thank you, Richard, for granting this interview to the *International Journal of Action Research*. We know that you have been, and continue to be, active in many fronts, and any interview will come short in terms of your rich life story. Let us focus on Action Research and related themes. In some circumstances you mentioned that your life is Action Research. Could you elaborate on this idea, eventually bringing in some examples? What does it mean to consider life as Action Research?

Richard: It is a privilege to be asked to reflect. I have not had a conventional career path. There have been apparent changes of direction, with successes and failures. In the UK, for example, with a background in English literature, I studied philosophy and history at King’s College, Cambridge University, before teaching in the UK and Nigeria. I was then a researcher and research manager in logic programming and artificial intelligence at Imperial College London. I have tried to take on a series of challenges, in different fields, which means that my “career” (or “skid”) can seem to be a series of “projects”, with varying levels of success.

In December 1985 I resigned my government funded posts in opposition to UK participation in President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which threatened the research which I was managing. I suddenly spent some months in 1986 as a peace campaigner. My collaborations in Scandinavia began in December 1986: with Bo Göranson, who was interested in my resignation, and the issue of what he called “civil courage”, and with Björn Gustavsen from 1988, who introduced me to “Action Research case studies” as a way of evaluating managed research programmes. Both had been influenced by the philosophy of Wittgenstein, whose work I had encountered at Cambridge. My subsequent work in Scandinavia has been in Working Life Research. I worked at Kingston College from 1986, and as a Professor at Kingston University from 1990. My referee for the professorship was the director of the national programme from which I had resigned in 1985.

Miren and Danilo: Richard, could you come back to the idea of life as action research?

Richard: This is a very useful challenge, which has prompted me to further reflection. I have always tried to respond to opportunities. I have had no specific clear goal, other than to work on projects in which I believe. I do not have a personal website. I could describe my life as Action Research.

On reflection, I can see how foundations were laid:

- At school in the UK in 1964, I experienced an Action Research approach to physics teaching, in particular “wave-particle duality”.
- From my time as a student in the USA in 1969, encountering the human relations movement and working in a quality control tester in a woolen mill, I have been familiar with the challenge of fitting in with different discourses: finding the appropriate vocabulary and concepts, and engaging in dialogue. It was always a matter of combining action and research.
- Leading weekly Study Groups on social issues at Cambridge University, with students from many disciplines.
- The influence of Frege, Wittgenstein and Chomsky: action and research; speech acts.
- Role play and simulations: this took me from school history teaching to artificial intelligence research.